P. Pavlenko

HAPPINESS

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Pyotr Pavlenko

HAPPINESS

A Novel

STALIN PRIZE
1947

Петр Павленко

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Pyotr Pavlenko

HAPPINESS

A NOVEL

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To N. K. Treneva

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

"Dear old pal,

"I have received a letter from Alexandra Ivanovna Goreva.

"Here are a few lines about you:

"Do you know where Voropayev is? He was severely wounded and removed into the interior. Some say that he has been granted indefinite leave, but we don't know anything for certain. He has forgotten us all.

"If you get to know where he is, and how he is, drop me a line at once. Field post office number as before."

Voropayev crumpled the letter and threw it overboard. The boat was approaching the pier. Dusk was falling. Shadows were already creeping over the mountains, which, in all shades of blue, hung over the town in the most picturesque fashion, like low storm clouds. The orchards surrounding the town in grey masses reminded one of a mist rolling at the mouth

of a gorge, and the dense shadows of the clouds on the mountainsides looked like broad, dark ravines.

The enamellike water of the small bay reflected the cloud of mountains in their different shades of blue, the tender hue of the sky, and something else, deep, subtle and beautiful that, unseen, looked down into the sea from above—perhaps it was the music that was wafted from the distant houses, perhaps the fragrance of the woods that hung heavily over the sea, or perhaps the strong and expansive voice of the woman singing over the radio that rolled so freely over the land and sea and fitted so well into the scene that it seemed to belong to a being that lived somewhere here among the mountains.

While still at a distance, as soon as the boat began cautiously to make its way into the bay, Voropayev could see the mutilated esplanade, the ruins of the landing pavilion and the bomb-shattered pier. Involuntarily he winced on feeling the pain that had overcome him many times before—at Stalingrad, at Kiev, everywhere, where he had seen the trail of the Germans.

The pier and the esplanade, where before the war noisy, merry crowds had gathered to

meet the boat from Odessa or from Batumi, and where speech in at least six different languages was heard, were now silent.

Several German gun emplacements built of porous limestone protruded where formerly the noisy "floating restaurants" were situated. The wreckage of a landing barge bestrewed the beach.

"This is not the place I should have come to," mused Voropayev, anxiously wondering where he would find a place to stay at, and what he would do first in this seemingly derelict town that looked so unlike itself.

The captain, who had been gazing at the shore as if it were a newly-discovered harbour, turned to Voropayev and said with a despairing gesture:

"The town's dead."

Voropayev leaned over the bridge.

About a hundred and fifty passengers, settlers from Kuban, were crowding excitedly round the gangway, all shouting in a frenzy.

Cows were unloaded from the holds, mooing with fright as they hung helplessly from the winch ropes.

Cossack women, their skirts tucked up high, rushed along the pier, trying in different ways to soothe the frightened cattle, lugging sacks

containing squealing pigs, or carrying baskets with chickens. Others were rocking in their arms children not yet recovered from seasickness, or, amidst the jeers of the men, were carrying pots with broad-leaved ficus plants which they had brought here, goodness knows what for.

An elderly Cossack who had been looking round timidly at the sea and the mountains, turned to a young woman, evidently his daughter-in-law, and said:

"What's bad about this? It may be bad for an old woman, like when the stove is too high.... And look, we're in December, and yet it seems like May."

This did not console the young woman. She sniffed hard, ready to cry.

"Those from Taman, Starosteblyev, Slavyansk!... Sign up!... Disabled men—to Stoiko!... Soldiers' wives—this way!..."

"Hey, Stepanich!" came a voice from the pier, shouting to the old man. "What are you waiting there for?" The old man, startled by the voice, jerked his head up, looked timidly at the people around him and stepped down the gangway.

"Miserable Robinson Crusoes! What the devil drove them here?" growled the cap-

tain. And turning to Voropayev he enquired: "Are you with them, Comrade Colonel?"

"No, I am on my own, I . . ." but a fit of coughing prevented him completing the sentence, and so he did not say why, actually, he had come here.

It seemed to him rather awkward to say that he had just been discharged from hospital and had come here on extended leave with the intention of getting a little cottage, although, as he had already noticed the day before, there were several men here like him, with walking sticks and gold and red wound stripes.

"Are you from these parts?" the captain asked.

"Something like that," answered Voropayev to put the captain off.

"Then it's not so bad. Otherwise, what sort of a life is it here. Don't be in a hurry to get off"—he said, seeing Voropayev making for the bridge ladder. "That crowd will knock you off your feet as easy as winking. You lost your leg not long ago, I can see that. You are not used to the artificial one yet. . . . And I ask you, why are they coming here? What's this resettlement? What's it for? You won't find even a nail here, the war has taken

everything, but they—give them this and give them that!... They'll all scuttle away when the winter comes, take my word for it. Is it possible to build life on bare rocks? Madness I call it. Nonsense!... Like going gipsying!"

Paying no heed to the captain, Voropayev cautiously stepped down the ladder, leaning on his crutch on his left side and holding on to the rail on his right. A seaman helped him take his suitcase and knapsack down the gangway and at last he was glad to feel firm ground under his foot. His head swam pleasantly. He slowly made his way to the town, coughing as he went.

The pier, and the square near the ruins of the landing stage pavilion where the booking office was situated before the war, and which had always been so animated, were now quite deserted.

The esplanade was lined by a row of uninhabitable ruins.

The town had shifted to the side, further away from the sea.

At the Party Committee headquarters, now also very quiet, with small, flickering, homemade paraffin lamps on the tables in the deserted, dilapidated, but once magnificent rooms,

they were amazed to hear that a sick, one-legged Colonel had arrived to recuperate, not with an order for a place in a sanatorium—that would not have been so bad as one or two sanatoria were already functioning—but entirely on his own, with the intention of renting a small cottage and living the best way he could.

And there can be no doubt that it was only thanks to this amazement that his arrival was at once reported to Korytov, the secretary of the District Party Committee. The latter, stepping into the waiting room, took Voropayev by the arm, led him into his office, seated him in an armchair and, before reading his papers, peered suspiciously into his eyes.

Korytov's face, sallow and wrinkled, looked sickly, and the look with which he met this strange visitor expressed perplexity and even alarm.

It was not an attractive face; it was listless, stony and repellent at the very first glance.

"You don't think I'm a crook, do you?"

The secretary raised his brows without answering.

"To tell you the truth, you are the first man like this to come and see me," he said a little later, after reading all Voropayev's papers

over and over again several times. "What are you going to start with, Colonel?" he enquired, and he answered his own question himself, appearing not to notice Voropayev's embarrassment. "The best way to start would be by getting yourself lodgings. That's the first thing! Then something to eat. That's the second! But, my friend, you can't do that today. We get a hot meal only once a day. Do you know these parts well?" and again without waiting for a reply, he added: "Well, in that case, choose yourself what suits you best. What do you intend to do, work, or live on your pension?"

While questioning Voropayev, the secretary gazed at him with unfriendly, suspicious eyes, and those eyes, and his whole face, clearly expressed fear of the unpleasant complications that must inevitably arise in connection with this absurd Colonel who had come here to recuperate while the war was still on, and was claiming a house with an orchard, as if he were at least a thrice Hero of the Soviet Union. And he, Korytov himself, was living in a house without windowpanes.

"Hear me out, Comrade Korytov," said Voropayev, carefully taking his papers out of the secretary's hands. "I'll tell you straight.

Evidently I've done a foolish thing in coming here. I can see that. But by and large, I'll try to fix myself up in such a way as not to be hanging round your neck."

"You won't hang round my neck. I'll put a stop to that in two ticks," the secretary interrupted in an emphatic and hostile voice. "And the main thing is, whether you do or not, you'll get nothing out of it."

"I understand. I understand. So first I'll try to find a nook to put up in, and then I'll come round and we'll talk about work."

"Would you take a district attorney's job?" asked Korytov, thinking of something else. "How are you as a lecturer? Not dusty work, you know, I won't pile it on to you too much, and after all, there's the ration and one thing and another.... Sign on as a lecturer. Zhurina!" he called hurriedly. "Ask somebody from the Personnel Department to come here!... Hard lines, we have no telephones. Vocal communication, brother, like in hand-to-hand fighting...."

But nobody came, and Korytov, with the same hurried movements as those with which he had taken the papers from Voropayev, unrolled on his desk a tattered plan of the town marked all over with coloured pencil.

"You can choose here," he said, flipping the southwestern part of the town, the famous Tea Hill, that bordered on the grounds of a formerly rich and princely mansion. "Or here," sweeping his hand to the southeast, along the highroad, where commenced the vineyards of a very big sovkhoz, dotted with small private country houses and small rest homes.

"The houses, as you know, have been badly battered and need heavy repair. How you will manage that I don't know. I will not be able to help you, as you can understand.... If I had the people I might have been able to do something, but I haven't, do you understand? I have nobody. It's simply awful!"

Suddenly dropping Voropayev's private affairs, which he undoubtedly regarded as being absurd, Korytov began to talk anxiously about the affairs of his district, and his thin face and tired eyes, expressing alarm and suspicion, lit up.

He talked about what was worrying him a great deal, and what engaged his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. His thoughts were concentrated on those difficult, insoluble problems of life which it was his duty to solve in the very immediate future. Already, central headquarters, without waiting until he had

extricated himself from the deadlock, were piling on to him other problems which he would be able to solve only after he had solved the first, as yet unsolved ones; and he knew from experience that any day he would have thrust on his shoulders the third, fifth, eighteenth problems, the solution of which depended upon the solution of the second, fourth and seventeenth, and he realized that he had no right to postpone their solution, or to pass the job on to somebody else. And that was why his irritation never left him, even in his sleep. Even when asleep he scolded or swore.

While talking, Korytov became more cheerful, although what he related was far from being so; but the whole point, he assured Voropayev, was that there was not another district on the whole Black Sea coast that had such wonderful prospects as his district had, and that only mere trifles prevented him, Korytov, from grappling with these prospects in real earnest.

Just at that moment the office door opened and, without knocking, a short, slim woman wearing a white waiter's jacket and soft felt slippers entered the room. She carried a tray bearing a glass of tea and an egg-powder omelet on a small plate.

On seeing a stranger she halted and glanced disapprovingly at him. Voropayev at once noticed her disapproval and for an instant his surprised and her unfriendly look crossed and caused mutual embarrassment. Continuing to talk, Korytov waved to the woman to put the tray on the edge of the desk and, raising two fingers he, still continuing to talk, indicated to her that she must bring another portion for the visitor.

The woman answered with a barely perceptible shake of the head that there was no second portion, and then she turned her stern grey eyes to the small cupboard in the corner. Catching her glance, Korytov again waved his hand, expressing permission this time, and again raised two fingers.

He continued relating how depopulated the district was; meanwhile the woman crossed the floor and took from the cupboard a half-empty bottle of wine and two goblets contracted in the middle like those they drink tea out of in Iran, and in Georgia only wine. These she placed on the table and then, leaning against the wall, waited until Korytov would stop speaking.

"But once subjugated, nature, you understand, cannot be left without man's attention,"

continued Korytov, pouring the wine into the glasses, cutting the omelet into two with the fork, and with a gesture inviting Voropayev to have a drink and a bite. He must have been afraid to stop talking lest Voropayev should go away.

"A vine is like a cow. It is not enough to feed a cow, brother. She wants petting. Stroke her more often, and she will repay in litres. A vine is exactly the same, let me tell you. If you don't bank the damn thing up in time, if you don't prune and spray it, the hell will you get anything out of it! It won't grow into the variety you want, and the grapes will be about the size of cranberries. And the main thing is that your only harvester are your hands. Everything has to be done by hand, like in the days of Methuselah."

Listening attentively, Voropayev wanted several times to stoop down to reach his knapsack in which he had a can of meat, but each time Korytov restrained him almost by force.

"Water, we have no water! It's frightful!" he continued tirelessly, his ire against the local conditions of life mounting higher and higher. "You, my dear friend, have come here to recuperate. All you need is beauty, mountains,

flowers, the sea; but that's all painted lips and pencilled eyebrows. As for the actual situation —you can't imagine anything worse."

Voropayev glanced at the woman at the wall. Her pale but energetic and inexplicably charming face betrayed indifference to what Korytov was saying. Her grey eyes under the sharply-curved eyebrows of the born Cossack woman calmly scanned the face of the visitor.

"Do you understand me now? Do you hear? No fuel, no transport facilities. . . . There were over a thousand motor trucks in this district; now there are five 'trophies' without tyres. . . . We have no light. It's simply terrible!"

Listening to Korytov, Voropayev gradually began to understand what an absurd, queer and even offensive impression must have been created on Korytov's mind by the arrival on his private affairs of a Communist of long standing and experience—true, four times wounded, with a stump of a left leg and suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis—but still capable of doing a lot of work, but instead of that was thinking of settling down to a silly, quiet life on a farm.

He glanced at Korytov's angry face to ascertain whether the secretary was angry with

him, but he could not make sure. He got up to go.

Korytov was not surprised that his visitor was leaving, he did not ask him to stay; finishing something he was saying about his own affairs, he shook hands with him.

The woman stepped away from the wall and collected on the tray the two glasses, the plate which had contained the omelet, and the ash tray filled with cigarette stubs.

All she had gathered from the conversation was that the visitor—although he had lots of decorations, was of high rank and looked an imposing person—was going to have a hard time. His sallow-waxen skin, the dark rings under his eyes, which gleamed all the time as if with excitement, showed that the man was sick, very sick. She sighed and noiselessly left the room.

As Voropayev was going out Korytov shouted after him:

"You must give a talk to the Party Active in a day or two. Tell them something about the Cherkassova movement. All right?"

"Do you often call the people together?" Voropayev enquired from the threshold.

"Not very often. There's no place to meet in, and no time to meet; and besides, the food

situation is awful, you know, and that, brother, affects people's mood."

"I should say so. I know that from my own experience," said Voropayev.

Korytov helplessly spread out his arms.

The waiting room (which had evidently been the drawing room of this palatial mansion) was almost in darkness. The tiny paraffin lamp was smoking and flickering at its last gasp.

"You can leave your things here," came a voice out of the gloom. "I will lock them up. Nobody will steal them."

"Who's that?"

"It's me. Lena," answered the voice, and Voropayev guessed that it was the thin little woman who had brought in the supper.

Leaving his suitcase, but taking his knapsack, which contained some provisions, Voropayev left the mansion.

It was so dark that the houses merged with the air. He halted to get his eyes accustomed to the gloom. The ground exhaled a humid warmth. Voices were heard in the distance. Evidently, a party of settlers were coming from the wharf. The waves beat rhythmically against the shore. From these sounds Voropayev was able to judge only that the sea was on his

left, and the voices, well, that meant that the street was on his right. But he could not move, because he was unable to tell where the house was, and where the roadway. The luminous dial of his wrist watch showed that it was nearly midnight—a good four hours before dawn. He was at a loss what to do.

"Have you lost your way?" Lena's white jacket loomed by his side. "Where do you want to go?"

"To the kolkhoz," he answered, saying the first thing that came to his mind, "I suppose I'll spend the night there."

It seemed to him that she shrugged her shoulders, but it being so dark, he could not be sure of that.

"I am going that way. Come, I'll show you how to get there," said Lena.

Voropayev stepped out briskly to follow the white jacket patch that glided away from him. The woman moved so noiselessly in her soft felt slippers that Voropayev was scarcely aware of her nearness, and only her breathing told him that she was somewhere close by.

"Give me your arm, you are like a ghost," he said, smiling, and he heard a low warning:

"Take care you don't hurt yourself. You've come back from the war alive, but you may meet with a fatal accident here."

"Such things happen. Let's walk slower. I can't catch my breath."

They walked arm in arm, as if out for a stroll, and ascended the steep, tree-lined street. Derelict houses stood dumb on each side.

There was a dank smell of long-cooled embers, and not a movement, not a sound reached their ears, which were strained to the utmost in the unnatural silence.

"Can't even hear a dog bark," whispered Voropayev. "Even the dogs have deserted the place."

"Are you going to live here?" enquired Lena.

"I suppose so."

"With your family, or alone?"

"My family—all I have is a little son, seven years old. It was for his sake that I undertook this foolish journey to the South."

"Is he ailing?"

"Yes," answered Voropayev reluctantly, feeling that this interest the woman was showing in him did not come from her heart, but from the desire to report everything to her Korytov. "You must be having a hard time

here. That Korytov of yours"—a fit of coughing compelled him to stop—"I must say I don't like him."

She interrupted him and, shaking his arm, said:

"But Comrade Colonel, he could not ask you to stay the night with him. He couldn't, believe me. They have a tiny room—he, his wife and two little boys, sleeping wherever they can."

"Oh, I don't mean that. He's so crusty. Do you mean to say he couldn't let me put up at the District Committee?"

"He's not a bit crusty," said the woman emphatically. "And besides, is it possible to please you people? They keep on coming and demanding—one wants a country house, another a palace, a third I don't know what.... But none of them asks how we are living! We get bread every third day, and as for sugar and fats—I have forgotten what they are like. And we too have children, and we too...."

She broke off as if afraid of blurting out something that could not be confided to a stranger.

"Either they don't report the truth to Stalin," she said after a pause—and again it seemed to him that she shrugged her shoul-

ders—"or, well, I really don't know what's going on. It's all plans and plans, but what about us human beings? They've piled these plans on us right over our heads."

"You've got your Korytov to thank for that. A plan is a good thing in good hands."

"It's all right for you who haven't got any plans. You'll rent a house in the country, with an orchard. If you have only three apple trees, they, thank God, will bring you in fifteen hundred or two thousand rubles in the season. You can afford to criticize."

"What, do you think I intend to become a fruit dealer?"

"Everybody's doing it. . . ."

He said nothing. The woman stopped talking. The street, rising steeply above the old orchards, became brighter and wider. The hazy glare of a campfire loomed in the distance.

"So you are a widower," said the woman, and then added with humorous irony: "But that will soon be mended. Women are not particular nowadays. They're glad to take anyone, young or old."

He was hurt by the thought that she took it for granted that he was "old."

"Are you a widow? Single I mean," he asked, ready to give her tit for tat, and he felt

her lean, thin arm and small, roughened, seemingly swollen fingers tremble.

"I don't know," she answered. "Widow, or abandoned wife. My husband was at Sevastopol. I haven't had a word from him or about him for three years. I haven't even received the 'burial certificate.' "

They walked on for a long time in silence.

"There's your kolkhoz. Good luck! I have to turn off here," he heard her say at last and felt her arm being withdrawn from his. The white jacket patch glided to the right and upwards.

"Thank you!"

"Don't mention it. . . ."

The small square in this suburb, which for some reason was counted as a village, the wide-open shop premises, the sidewalks, the courtyards and the roadway in the middle of the street were crowded with the passengers who had come off the boat that evening. Some were sitting on their bundles, trunks or baskets, and some were even lying on the bare ground.

There was something disorderly about the appearance of this casual camp, the kind of disorder that prevails among a body of people

who have got together suddenly without any clearly apparent object.

"Like when our unit was surrounded," was the thought that flashed through Voropayev's mind. "No order. No discipline."

Indeed, the people were not sleeping, although it was late in the night, nor were they engaged in any definite work; they were anxiously awake, like people at river wharves or railway stations dozing and waking with a start at the arrival of every boat or train, afraid to miss the one they are waiting for. Here, some were warming up food, others were feeding their weary cattle, others again were singing in a carefree manner, while still others stood together in a crowd evidently waiting for somebody.

Voropayev enquired where he could find the chairman of the kolkhoz.

Somebody pointed to a tall, handsome man in an army tunic and with the Red Star and the Sevastopol Medal pinned on his breast. The left sleeve of his tunic was empty. He was talking to an old man in a sailor's reefer. They were waving lighted lanterns in front of each other's faces and arguing about something. Voropayev squatted down by a campfire and kept the two men in sight.

He felt an irresistible desire to stretch out, not simply lie down, but stretch out and fall asleep. But since he could not sleep, he would have liked to take a bite, have a good feed, in fact, like at the front; but he thought it would be awkward to open his knapsack in front of these people. He stretched out near the fire, rested his head on his knapsack and shut his eyes.

The night was humidly warm, calm, almost like spring. The air lazily skimmed the ground, wonderfully fragrant, southern and soothing, like the chirping of grasshoppers.

"Splendid . . ." thought Voropayev, dozing off; but he pulled himself together and even rose up on his elbow and looked around for the chairman, but the latter was gone.

The crowd of people swept to one side and those sitting at the fire also got up and followed the rest, leaving the potatoes boiling in the pots.

Voropayev too wanted to get up, but he had not the strength to do so. But why should he get up? He was comfortably fixed up for the night at this campfire. He slipped his hand under the belt of his trousers, carefully unstrapped his artificial leg and, holding his breath, puffing and wincing, he stroked his numbed

stump and at once felt that he would fall asleep in an instant.

And he did indeed fall asleep, but with that extraordinary lightness with which children sleep when they still hear the conversation of those around them. Strange as it may seem, even while snoring Voropayev heard loud conversation about vacant houses and about immediately occupying them.

"I ought to get up." But he could not get up.

"Three rooms, what they call a veranda, and a shed, all in good condition," somebody shouted in a loud and masterful voice.

A second later, a hoarse voice, belonging, as he guessed later, to the chairman of the kolkhoz, Mikola Stoiko, the handsome fellow with the Red Star, called out:

"Sidorenko! . . . Stepanich!"

"Here, Mikola Petrovich!"

"This is your house. Go in . . . and God send you happiness!"

"Lord Jesus Christ. . . . May those words come true. . . . May I? Garpina . . . boys. . . . Go in. Lord Jesus. . . . Let me go in first."

Voropayev listened, and smiling, caught with his tongue the tears that rolled to his mouth.

What a great and joyous event was taking place hard by here under the dark cover of night, amidst the flitting lantern lights, the smoke of the campfires and the disorder of this weary camp!

He did not see, nor did scarcely anybody else see, the old kolkhoznik, the one who had come with his daughter-in-law and grandsons, stumble into a tiny adobe house that was enveloped in the greenish darkness of an orchard. He entered, carrying a photograph of his son, which he stood up on the window sill, and then bowed low to the four walls.

"May we live well in you, may we prosper in you, you for us and we for you . . ." he muttered in a conspiratorial whisper. "May God grant us peace and happiness. Garpina, scrub the floors!"

At this moment came the glad announcement:

"Five rooms, verandas on both sides, an orchard with fifteen trees."

Silence. A cough. And then the hoarse voice:

"Khvatov! Tvorozhenkov!"

Two voices answered, one after another:

"Here! Here!"

"Are you willing to live together? One

facing this way, one the other.... It's a good house, two Dutch stoves, centrally situated.... Well?"

"What do you say, Petro, we won't quarrel, will we?"

"Of course not! You take the left side, to hell with it.... It's a pity there are fifteen trees. If we could have at least eight each.... What side is the water tap on?"

"On mine!"

"Dammit! Let's draw lots then...."

In the darkness, not interfering with the loud talk around them, people were conversing at each campfire:

"The soil here is simply marvelous! You go to bed, there's nothing; you get up—it's as thick as anything."

"It's your head that's thick. Go to sleep!"

"What tenacity! Where does it come from?" mused Voropayev. "And this inexhaustible youthful spirit, this readiness to perform great deeds, this love for everything that is new even when it is hard, this thrilling restlessness? Where did we get it? And how did we manage to preserve it? It's good! Oh, how good it is!" And now he fell fast asleep.

* * *

After guiding Voropayev to the kolkhoz square, Lena climbed the steps of the little street to the top of the hill that sheltered the town and without making the slightest sound pushed open the imperceptible door of a small, semi-dilapidated house. She entered like a breath of air, but her mother, who had long fallen asleep next to her six-year-old granddaughter, heard at once that somebody had come in and enquired anxiously:

"Is that you, Lenochka?"

"Yes," answered Lena, rather loudly. "Is the lamp on the table?"

"On the table, to the left. Why are you so late tonight? A meeting?"

"I showed a disabled officer to the place he wanted to go," answered Lena, lighting the small paraffin lamp and, speaking rapidly, she told her mother about Voropayev, about the talk he had with Korytov, about what people had come to the District Committee, on what business, and how their affairs had been arranged, and she also told her what rations, still owing from the month before last, would be issued within the next few days.

The most surprising thing is that of all the persons Lena had told her about, it was Voropayev that impressed her mother most, and

she enquired several times what he looked like, whether he was old or young, and then for a long time sighed and scolded under her breath:

"They'll keep coming and be a burden to us, this one with Medals and that one with crutches.... O Lord!"

Lena set down to darn her stockings. When she finished she took her little daughter's jersey out of the trunk. It too needed mending, but that morning she had hidden it from her mother to prevent her from spoiling her eyes in mending it. She went on with her work and at rare intervals interjected a remark in approval of what her mother was saying:

"They will pour in now," grumbled the old woman. "Disabled men, wounded, injured; and they'll come first for everything, you can't refuse them. They will take all the houses...."

"Yes, I suppose that's what will happen," Lena agreed in an indifferent tone of voice.

"Listen," said her mother ingratiatingly. "Why not ask Korytov to assign this house to you? Otherwise, some legless fellow will come along and they'll put us out, and then what will we do?"

"They won't put us out," answered Lena. "And even if they do, they'll give us another place."

"What do we want another place for?" retorted the mother obstinately. "You won't find another orchard like this soon, my dear. Twenty-three trees, and every one a picture. True, the house needs repair, but that's not so important. It can wait a year or two. Speak to Korytov. Don't be shy."

"All right. I'll speak to him," answered Lena. "You'd better get some sleep, Mum, you'll have to go to the food line soon, and again you'll have no sleep. . . ."

It was almost daylight when, putting Tanechka's jersey aside, she got up and began to undress, carefully examining each article as she took it off, and if she found a loose button, a hole, or some other defect, she at once set it right and, holding the threaded needle between her teeth, continued to undress.

After darning her shorts and chemise, which was undergoing this operation for the third time, she stuck the needle in the wallpaper, blew the light out and rolled up on the trunk, covering herself with a blanket.

As soon as she had settled down and began to snore softly, the old woman got up heavily,

whispered to herself, rustled something like a frightened mouse, tucked her little granddaughter's blanket more snugly around her and, taking a bag and two glass jars, went into the street and there yawned with such gusto that both Lena and Tanechka woke up for a second and listened for what would come next.

That night seemed as if there had been no night at all. The settlers did not sleep; they were entering their new life. Those who had already been assigned quarters, fed and tended their cattle and cleaned up their yards; those who had not, followed pesteringly at the heels of the kolkhoz chairman. Housewives were squatting on the ground in the line outside the still closed village cooperative store, telling the story of their journey. The children kept the campfires burning.

Voropayev was sleeping at the end fire at which he had squatted the previous night. On her way to the store Lena's old mother recognized him at once from the description her daughter had given her.

The first rays of the sun were already darting across Voropayev's face; he slept, dreaming that he was being lulled by the gentle purring of kittens. He did not want to wake

for fear of finding that he was deceived, but somebody rudely shook him.

A strange old woman was standing over him.

"You'll be late for breakfast, Commander," she said sternly. "They are open there only till nine o'clock. And Korytov himself is here."

He could not for the life of him know who this old woman was, but he guessed that she was speaking about the District Committee dining room.

Hastily strapping on his artificial leg and slinging his knapsack on his back he rose briskly, amidst the glances of the women and youngsters, as if he were twenty years old and had never been to Kislovodsk to get treatment for his heart, had never had a severe bout of typhoid in Astrakhan during the Civil War when that splendid Bolshevik, Sergei Mironovich Kirov was leading the defence of the city, as if he had not taken part in the storming of Jassy and was not being tormented by a consumptive cough.

Lately, everything about him had diminished except his age; but at this particular moment he did not feel this humiliating burden. Nor did the hard times that formed a

good part of his reminiscences disturb him at this early, gently warm hour, among these people, strangers to him, who, like he, were beginning a new life.

Almost at once he caught sight of Korytov talking to the settlers about the prospects here. The secretary did not seem particularly pleased when Voropayev came up and stood listening to him attentively, trying hard to suppress his coughing. Korytov finished speaking about prospects and was about to start explaining real possibilities when he stopped short as if suddenly remembering something and in a voice that expressed irritation rather than interest he said, looking sideways at Voropayev:

"Why not take a job with them as accountant, Colonel? They'll give you a room at once, and when you bring your family here perhaps they'll, in time, build you a house."

The kolkhozniks looked inquisitively at Voropayev.

Stoiko, the kolkhoz chairman, the tall, well-built lad with the empty left sleeve, from habit, stood at attention.

"You'll not do badly with us, Comrade Colonel," he said in a restrained, but somehow very emphatic and cordial manner.

"I'll wait and look around a bit," answered Voropayev curtly, and then enquired: "Have you heard the communiqué?"

Nobody answered.

Korytov made no attempt to persuade him, but calmly proceeded to talk about the local possibilities; and judging by the way he enlarged on every tiny detail, it was evident that he intended to go on for a long time.

But the word "communiqué" that Voropayev had uttered had animated the audience. They began to whisper among themselves and did not listen to Korytov very attentively.

"He is starting at the wrong end," mused Voropayev, meaning Korytov. "The communiqué, communiqué, the Order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the events on the fronts, that's the chief thing today."

And without himself yet knowing with what object, most probably in order to be alone, he strode up the hill.

The sun had dried up the mists of the night and had spread them out along the southern slopes of the mountains like strands of damp yarn. Here there were mists of all types and all tints. Some were firm and compact like felt, some were rare, long and thin like yarn, and some looked like dead, white geese. The

damp, fluffy clouds, torn into scraps by the wind somewhere high over the mountains, hung in the air, separating the sea from the mountains with a living curtain. And the sea lay like a bluish lilac-coloured, roughly enamelled tray with a dented surface. Something was standing on the tray—a ship, perhaps, or a streaky shadow.

The odour of fragrant conifers, the pungent smell of wormwood and mint and the heavy, honeylike scent of savoury and clover came pouring down in torrents, rivulets and streams, tumbling and swirling in the morning sunshine. Although the time of the year utterly excluded the possibility of the grasses being in bloom, there could be no mistaking their odours. Perhaps they were only reminiscences, but what did that matter? The odours were there!

Thanks to them, Voropayev walked on scarcely noticing the climb. He had left the little town far behind. Amidst the ruins of a brick house standing in the remains of an orchard, parts of which had survived here and there, among lopsided wistarias which at present resembled dried snakes, Voropayev sat down to have his breakfast. Actually, he had not eaten since midday the day before. He still had some of the bread he had received in

Moscow, the sardines were Portuguese, trophies, and the sheath knife with the wild goat-leg handle was also a trophy.

From where he sat he could see the town from end to end, and for a good ten kilometres on each side of it stretched the coast, now well lit up by the slanting rays of the sun. The mountains, for some reason, remained in the shade all the time, as if the sun was unable to reach them, or else by-passed them.

"Is it possible that there shouldn't be a three-roomed house around here?"

Before the war there were a number of sanatoria on the hills between the town and the mountain ridge; now they were in ruins, but some of the small cottages around them, where the doctors and nurses had lived, were still intact. The trouble was that these cottages had no light, no fuel, and were far from the town.

Having nothing to do, he got up and examined the walls which had provided him with casual shelter.

Evidently, before it was wrecked, this had been a small, four-roomed house with a kitchen ("Just what I need!") and an orchard back and front. ("A lovely orchard! One, two, three ... twenty-six trees.") A hydrant was protruding from the ground in the yard next

to a balcony, and stretches of wire were dangling from poles. So they must have had electricity here. A graded road ran uphill, almost on the edge of the front garden. ("A splendid place! We could bring firewood right up to the house!") Voropayev got up on a pile of stones to get a better view of the ruined house. It had no roof, no window frames, no doors and no floors. Everything inflammable was burnt out, and what was left was not worth a kopek. But the site, an irregular triangle, was excellent. The remains of a low stone wall indicated its crooked boundaries as if by a dotted line. On the left there was a deep ravine. ("Build a small dam and you can have your own water supply.") On the right and in front of the house there were vineyards; to the left ran the slate hills.

Scratching the figures on the ground with a twig, Voropayev counted up how many bricks would be required to restore the house.

It was useless even dreaming of it. And yet, a better place he would not find; he realized that, provided the house could be rented. But judging by all the signs, the owner had long ago shared the fate of his house.

Yes, it was a first-rate place, that couldn't be denied. The only trouble was that it was a

wonderful and at the same time an absolutely useless find. Not under any circumstances could an individual owner manage the task of rehabilitating it.

Voropayev scanned the houses of the kolkhoz which, standing in the midst of orchards and vineyards, were clearly visible from where he was.

Before the war, along the banks of a ravine-like mountain river to the west of the kolkhoz, there had stretched two rows of private houses.

Several poplar trees, plucked like cockerels, and an iron railing around gutted houses were all that indicated where the country villas had been. The war had consumed the fine, big houses and had left intact all that was old and dilapidated, as if man, today, was supposed to rest content with little.

"Well, I must choose something."

Involuntarily, Voropayev's thoughts reverted to the house, on the threshold of which he was standing.

Strictly speaking, nothing could be better. In all probability he could get the repairs done on credit. Voropayev tried to picture to himself what life would be in this house.

He pictured his son arriving, a fair-haired, thin little northerner. He saw himself arrang-

ing his books on the shelves—the devil take them, they have been in those packing cases since the winter of 1939 and they have grown mouldy! And he saw himself walking with his son to the beach from here.... He smiled as he pictured himself in his pyjamas, holding a fishing rod. He had no intention, of course, of settling down here like a pensioner retired from life, but the first thing a homeless man must think of is to build a nest for himself. But here a thought struck him that overshadowed all the other thoughts that were engaging his mind—the thought about milk.

"It's good to drink goat's milk in the morning. That would not be difficult to arrange, of course," was the next thought that came to him. Then came a third: "Where would it have to be brought from? And who would bring it?"

He roughly calculated the distance from this house to the nearest kolkhoz building; he reckoned it was about two kilometres.

An abyss opened, into which all his plans collapsed. Never mind about the milk, but how will Seryozha be able to go to school all this distance? Not in the summer, but in the windy, winter months? And then, who will prepare their food? They could not go to the restaurant, and besides, where the hell is that res-

taurant? Somewhere right on the beach! Where was he to get fuel? And who would see to all this?

It at once became clear to him that a one-legged man couldn't be a housekeeper, and that he, Voropayev, was not destined to have a house of his own.

"But what if *she* were with me?"

But as soon as he pictured the light, always hurrying figure of Alexandra Ivanovna Goreva in her starched surgeon's robe amidst the chaos of this devastated, remote place, pictured her chopping wood or carrying water, he realized that even with her life here, in this mountain nest, would be absurd and impossible.

Even if his wife Varya, Seryozha's mother, were to rise from her grave, Varya, who could do everything, even then life would not be worth living here, because, although Varya had been closer to the land than Alexandra Ivanovna is, she would not have been able to live so far away from what, for some reason, is called civilization, and which consists mainly in having the toilet in the house, electric light, central heating and a gas-heated bath.

At forty-three, after having lost a great deal of strength in the war, it was difficult to start a new life on the ruins of somebody else's.

Voropayev rummaged in his knapsack, pulled out a flask and one after another, gulped down two flask-tops of vodka.

No, he would not be able to live the good life here. To invite a young, city-born woman, a woman who had been moulded by the city, to come to these backwoods to raise chickens and catch fish!... No, the idea was absurd!

But what was he to do if all his life he had dreamed of living by the sea and had been convinced that such a life was the highest bliss? And suddenly to feel that this dream had led him here into disgrace and shame?

Born and brought up in Siberia, Voropayev had seen the sea for the first time when he was already grown up—in Astrakhan. It had captivated him at first sight, like an inspired, living being, with whom one could tie one's fate forever. But life had flowed in other channels. He had spent his Young Communist League years in the Astrakhan steppes where fierce battles in defence of the Great October Revolution were being fought. Later, when he was already a Communist and had become an army officer, he had guarded the frontier on the Amur and had helped to build the city of Komsomolsk. The army became his home for

a good half of his life; and regiments, divisions and army corps were the villages and towns with the reminiscences of which his ideas of climate, landscape and conditions of life were associated.

To be able to tell you about the Pamirs or the Kulunda Steppe, he would first have to recall that this was a page of regimental history.

Hasan, Halhin-Gol and North Finland too were associated in his mind more with the names of army comrades and military operations than with the general features of life. And only the sea had fostered in his mind the pictures of repose and complete happiness which his restless nature had always somewhat lacked. At last he was beside the sea, but it turned out that he might just as well not have come here. He was stranded on the beach like a wrecked ship.

"Never mind, we'll try something else," he said, rising to his feet.

* * *

Several hours later he walked into Korytov's office. The latter was standing lost in thought before a map of the U.S.S.R. marking the line of the front.

"Have you found anything suitable?" he enquired in a careless tone, and without waiting for a reply, which seemed to be a habit of his, he remarked: "You should have taken that accountant's job. Future millionaires, that's what they are, brother. Two years from now they would have built you a house such as you have never dreamed of! Have you heard the communiqué?"

Voropayev did not interject any reply or comment to the first part of Korytov's remarks, wishing by his silence to emphasize his complete indifference to the housing problem. But when Korytov paused after the last question he answered sternly:

"If I haven't heard it, it's not so bad. But what is very bad is that your people haven't heard it."

"What do you mean by my people?" Korytov enquired listlessly, searching in vain for a point on the map that he wanted. "One or two may not have heard it, and you talk about people. What a lover of the people, to be sure! The Oder—is it a big river? I can't find it. The individual doesn't interest me, brother," he continued, stepping away from the map and advancing on Voropayev with the obvious intention of giving him wordy battle and de-

termined to win. "It's the people that interests me. I like to generalize. If your thoughts are only your own thoughts, they don't interest me."

"If you go on generalizing like that you will begin to regard yourself as a collective body. What do you mean the individual doesn't interest you? In that case, I suppose Stakhanov doesn't interest you? There are lots of Stakhanovites, but there is only one Stakhanov."

"Go easy! This is not a debating society. Don't let your thoughts run away with you."

"I don't see your argument. Of course, you say, there are thousands like Voropayev, therefore Voropayev, cannot interest me, you, that is, since he represents only one-thousandth of a value. You take people wholesale; it's not worth your while to study them individually. But that's silly, Korytov. There's not even a whiff of Marxism in that, brother."

He felt an urge to go on speaking, but Korytov interrupted him drily:

"We'll discuss that another time. Tell me what you have come for...."

"To sign on as a propagandist," answered Voropayev and smiled, because he saw that Korytov did not believe him and yet was pleased to hear this. "Yes, yes. I mean it. On my word of honour."

Korytov frowned ponderously and sank into his armchair.

"I was sure you'd come," he said, slashing the air with his arm. "I was prepared to bet on it. Well, I'm glad. It's not for us, old Party workers, to live in country houses, brother. It's not our profession. Let others do it . . ." and noticing the expression of disagreement on Voropayev's face he exclaimed in sincere surprise: "That's right! What do you want a country house for? You'd do better to find a nice apartment near the sea, on the esplanade. Yes, you've done the right, honest thing. Well, now, let's arrange it. What do you want to be? Propagandist? Instructor? I'll agree to anything. It's not like that silly idea of yours to get a house. Colonel, Chief of Army Corps Political Department, six decorations, has written books. . . ."

Korytov rapidly, without a single error, quoted by heart the items from Voropayev's questionnaire, and the latter was forced to confess to himself that the secretary had a splendid memory.

"Devil take it! You have tremendous experience in Party mass work!" continued Korytov, raising his voice.

"All right, you needn't say any more about that. I have told you I am willing to work at the District Committee. But get me fixed up first. That's an absolute condition."

"Lena! Lenochka!" shouted Korytov, getting excited and at the same time nodding agreement with what Voropayev had said.

"What is she here, your office manager?"

Lena noiselessly entered the room.

"All my people are away. She's the only one left here. Have you the keys of the hostel, Lenochka? You must arrange for a bed for Comrade Voropayev."

"Now listen! What's this nonsense? What do you mean, a bed? Give me an apartment. The one you spoke about, near the sea. I've got to bring my child here. Try and understand at last! And I myself am as sick as the devil."

"All in good time," said Korytov. "I can mention an apartment right now. Primorskaya Street, number eight, flat number eleven. In the house I am living in, do you understand? Take it. There isn't a better one in the town. Still, you'll have to live at the hostel for the time being. Do you understand? In this flat I'm talking about there's not a single windowpane, not a single window frame, the stoves

are wrecked. Do you understand? Where can we put him?" he enquired of Lena. "Who lives next door to you?"

"Miroshin."

"Aha! Excellent! Let him take Miroshin's room. Have you the key? Voropayev can stay there for a couple of days and then we'll see." Turning to Voropayev: "I'll give you tomorrow to fix up and to prepare, and the day after you'll visit kolkhozes. I'll give you three. You'll be away about a week. Talk to the people. Help them. I myself will talk to the Regional Committee about you."

"Where will I put up when I come back?"

"Lena will fix you up again somewhere. Everybody is living like that here, whirling and whirling like on a roundabout. Go along now, Lenochka."

They were left alone.

"It was easier for you at the front, of course. You had adjutants, automobiles and telephones. You issued an order and it was obeyed. Isn't that so? But here, in the battered rear, we're having a hell of a time. For example, I am sending you on an assignment twenty-five kilometres from here, but I haven't a car to take you there, I have no telephone,

and the mail is brought on foot only twice a week. Do you realize what it is?"

Korytov's face had the look of a martyr, as if he were boasting of difficulties that he was unable to surmount.

"Is everybody here in the same mood as you?" Voropayev asked ironically. "Why are you persuading yourself that failure is inevitable? Get the people together, pick out the best among them, and rely on those. . . ."

"That's it! That's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about. Your job, my friend, will be to organize a Cherkassova movement in this district. When you do, we'll present you with a palace, by God, we will," said Korytov, waving his arm with affected nonchalance.

"What's the use of you talking to me about the Cherkassova movement? I know Cherkassova, I've had many a long talk with her to find out where and how she got the idea. You remember what she started with—with Pavlov's House, that famous, legendary house in Stalingrad. And do you know why? Because she was afraid that lots of new people would come pouring in and, in the hurry and bustle, the famous house would be forgotten and that the glory of the heroic deeds connected with it would fade. Her first idea was to restore,

not the whole city, but this one house—for ambition's sake. She restored that house, but in the meantime her idea was taken up by the press, by the public, by the Party; it was generalized, as you are fond of saying. . . ."

"Aha! You see? After all, it was generalized!" Korytov managed to interject.

". . . It was raised to a tremendous level and became a movement because it was taken up by tens of thousands of people, and primarily by Cherkassova herself. She proved to be fitted for such a level and did not fall, she held on to it."

"That's right! That's right! Now you put yourself in Cherkassova's place and see what it feels like, generalize her experience. Yes, yes, yes. Why not? Enthuse the people. You can do it. You are so fiery, just the man for it!"

They both talked at once, but, strange as it may seem, each heard the other and understood what he said; and they managed to express their thoughts and answer each other in spite of the fact that both were speaking in a louder and louder key. Lena, attracted by the shouting, came into the room and stood listening with curiosity to what they were saying. For a long time she was unable to grasp what they were arguing about, but one thing became

clear to her: that one-legged Colonel, piqued by his troubles and disappointments, was going to make a lot of trouble for everybody here and for Korytov in particular, and that it wouldn't be surprising if he ousted Korytov, for with the inexplicably unerring glance so characteristic of women, she saw that Voropayev was the abler man.

But they were shouting at each other:

"Enthuse the people, ha, ha, ha! But do you know what that means? How to go about it? In Stalingrad every brick is bloodstained, every ruin is a mausoleum of heroism. But what have you got here? What did your district do during the enemy occupation? How did it fight? Where is its glory and strength? Do you know?"

"Well, I give you the job of studying this question, of generalizing, analyzing, as befits such questions, and of submitting it to the Bureau of the District Committee in the form of concrete, practical proposals.... But my own private opinion is—start with a living example, enthuse the people, you know, Colonel, as you led men into battle.... 'Forward! Follow me!' That's how! That would be good!"

"Enthuse, enthuse! What are you talking about? Why haven't you enthused them up

till now? What have you been waiting for? Instead of being enthused, your people here are imbued with doubt, depressed by the difficulties, and you pile plans on their backs, plans on their backs; you stick silly papers under their noses. . . ."

"You are an insolent rascal, by God you are! The war has spoilt you all! You've all got out of hand! Dammit! What kind of a Communist are you if you have grown unaccustomed to spade work? All you want to do is give orders and write leaflets!"

"Say! Aren't you ashamed of yourself to talk like that? It's you who is running behind the people and shouting: 'Look how well I am leading.' The people will bear burdens on their backs without you: but lead them as Stalin teaches us, and they will move mountains."

"Wait! Listen! Try and understand this one thing: the people can be enthused by deeds, not by words. Now you organize that. Choose your people, tell them what to do and how to do it, lift them to a high level—and then things will begin to hum. . . . Heroism is not elemental, it must be organized. For heroes to be born you need midwives."

"That's right!"

"What's right?"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you. . . ."

"No, brother. It's what I'm telling you, but you object."

"I object?"

They stopped talking and, puffing and blowing, glared angrily at each other, neither able to remember who said "that's right" first.

"On the whole, you have understood what I wanted to tell you," said Korytov, brusquely drawing a folder towards him. "Heroism is organized; it is not elemental."

"That's right," agreed Voropayev, convinced that he had the last word. "That has always been my opinion."

"Then what have we been arguing about?"

"I don't know."

"So we haven't been arguing, but coming to an agreement, as it were?"

"Looks like it."

"Simply awful! Here we've been going for each other hammer and tongs for forty-five minutes! . . . Lena! . . . Lenochka! Have you any food to take on a journey?" enquired Korytov, hurriedly, but calmly now, in order to avoid another argument.

Lena, who had been standing with her arms crossed over her breast, dropped her

arms, leaned towards the cupboard and took out a bottle of red wine.

"I'll bring you the dry ration later on," she said in an indifferent tone. "You will be leaving from our place, where I live," she explained to Voropayev.

Korytov said, pointing to the bottle:

"That's from the *Pobeda* Sovkhoz. Five years old, bear that in mind. Make a point of visiting that sovkhoz. The director is Chumandrin, Fyodor Ivanovich, and the chief wine expert is Shirokogorov, Sergei Konstantinovich —a fine old man. You must deliver a lecture there, and have a talk with the people. They live right in the backwoods and don't see a new person for months on end. Here, take this, I've jotted down one or two things for you," and he handed Voropayev a sheet of paper on which was written in a careful, angular hand: "Program of lectures for Voropayev," followed by six subjects. Voropayev was amazed.

"When did you manage to write this?" he asked.

"Oh, when you went off in search of a palace, I sat down to do your thinking for you," and Korytov laughed a soundless laugh, winked and scratched his temple.

* * *

The mountains swept across the sky, diving into black, sticky storm clouds. The sea was a glassy black, like pitch. The black night air rattled and howled through the derelict houses. The wind had veered to the northeast and the weather suddenly turned cold.

Lena's mother took a clean sheet and pillowcase from her stock and spread them on Miroshin's bed, which was all crumpled and had not been made a long time. Miroshin had been away for over a week. Voropayev, with a pinch of tacks in his mouth, was replacing a broken windowpane with a piece of plywood.

"Do you call this life?" the old woman was saying. "Don't listen to what Korytov tells you, he's only leading you by the nose. Insist on getting a whole house. They won't give Lena and me one, but they can't refuse you. Stalin's orders. Only you must be persistent. What will you do when your child comes? Don't waste time, but keep on demanding and demanding. Of course, if you have nobody, I'd look after your little one, I have my little grandchild on my hands just the same. And I'd do the cooking for you.... Listen to me, an old woman, insist...."

"Do you mean it?"

"I'm telling you God's truth. Take even this house. It's ownerless. I haven't told anybody this, but I am telling you. Its owners have gone. They ran away with the Germans."

"You don't say!"

"There are four rooms here. Two have been wrecked by bombs—they will have to be repaired. Miroshin is single. They can give him a small room in town, and he would be very pleased if they did. And you know, there's a nice orchard here and a place to keep a cow and chickens."

"What about the view?"

"Do you mean the sea?" the woman asked, not grasping the question at once. "You can see the whole stretch, from end to end."

"What's the trouble then? Take it."

"The trouble, my dear, is that they won't give it to us. We have been refused. Miroshin doesn't care, he's single. He has no family, so he doesn't support our application. And if somebody more persistent comes along, they'll put us out. By God, they will. You'll see in the morning what a beautiful place this is! Like a sanatorium."

"I remember, I saw it today."

He did, indeed, easily recall the half-devastated, filthy garden with traces of old flower

beds and about a dozen cherry and apricot trees planted in disorder. The roughly-built stone wall was shattered. A German trench stretched in sharp zigzags through the yard. A heap of refuse indicated where a barn had once stood. Of course, it could not be compared with the lovely place he had roamed through that morning, but, on the whole, he could fix himself up here very nicely if he were alone. What was he looking for? Only a place to live in? Only now did it occur to him that he was searching not for a house, but for people with whom he could tie his fate. So the point was not that he had nowhere to live, but that he could not live alone.

"All right. I'll take this house if you like," he said. "For myself and for you. Two rooms for you and Lena, and two for me. You can choose. But what about the repairs? Do you think we'll be able to get them done?"

"Goodness gracious, you are a funny man!" exclaimed the old woman, touching his shoulder lightly with her rough, red hands. "What repairs are needed here? See for yourself." With that she vigorously pointed to the walls and ceiling and rapidly, as if repeating a well-memorized lesson, cited very precise details about building materials, which, she averred,

were available and could be easily obtained, and generally, according to her, the matter of repairs was scarcely worth talking about.

"She's hankering after people too. She too finds it hard to live alone," was the thought that flashed through Voropayev's mind as he listened to the woman talking rapidly, almost in a whisper.

"Bring your little boy here," she said. "I'll look after him and do the washing. You can't do that. I'll be a mother to him. Look!" and she slipped a paper covered with figures into his hand. "That's the rent, and this is insurance, and this for the gardener, we must have the orchard seen to, and this I put down for a dozen or so of vines. See how cosy it is?" ("She can already visualize, feel, is almost living in the imaginary house. . . .") "You'll thank me for this, good God, you will," and she peered anxiously into Voropayev's eyes, pleading with him to consent.

Voropayev himself began to visualize—the old woman had enthused him—the vines creeping up the white walls of the little house, and the flourishing orchard: he could almost hear the bees buzzing outside the window.

"Perhaps we'd better look for something higher up, in the hills?"

"No, no, no! Too far. Too lonely. Enough to drive you mad."

The old woman was afraid of house-hunting expeditions. She was already accustomed to her tiny room, and, as in a dream, the tiny room had happily grown into a house. "Here, here!" shouted her hands. Here, where the hearth is already lit, where there are neighbours, where washing is hanging on the line, and where her little grandchild is romping. Actually, what was he dreaming of? Was it not of a roof under which he could combat his illness? And was a beautiful house so absolutely necessary? He was not going to dig himself in for the whole of his life. But who can tell?

"Very good. I'll write an application and leave it with you. You do what's necessary. If you have no objection, I'll take the two upstairs," he said, deciding the fate of the house.

"Upstairs, upstairs, you can be easy about that. I myself counted on you going upstairs. . . ."

"I am leaving this evening."

"So you won't sleep here?"

"No. I'll be off to the kolkhozes today. I'll come back, and then we'll seriously set about putting the house to rights."

* * *

By the evening the storm was raging in real earnest. The northeast wind blew harder and harder with every hour that passed, the sea paled, the waves beat with dull thuds against the sea wall, the streets became deserted. But at this moment the weather did not trouble Voropayev in the least. Having "voted for" leaving the town, he soon arranged for a lift in an empty three-ton truck that was going in his direction. There was something bracing about the weather, like the bustle before a battle. It diverted his mind from his sad reflections and roused in him the feverish excitement he used to feel before a decisive attack, when he wanted things to be as bad and as hard as they possibly could be so that later, when strength was giving out, they should become better and easier, better and easier.

And as soon as the thought about an attack had flashed through his mind he recalled his friends at the front. Where were they? On the twenty-ninth of last month, judging by the Order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the troops of the Third Ukrainian Front—the front he had been fighting on—pierced the enemy's defences on the west bank of the Danube. Among the names mentioned in the Order he had seen that of the Commander of the Fourth

Guards Army. That meant that his own corps had fought for the Danube crossing and, no doubt, had been among the first to pierce the defences, and that meant that Goreva had been there with her hospital. He vividly pictured the whole scene that was enacted there. He knew those parts perfectly from the map, and still better from intuition. How many times had he travelled through the valley of the Danube in his imagination, like a novelist studying the situation in order to place his personages in circumstances of the utmost truth.

He knew the Danube well and could visualize how the whole front, and the Fourth Guards Army, had fought, and he saw and heard what every one of his close friends there had done and said.

He could see the modest, soldierly, weather-beaten face of the Army Commander, a composition of the elements of simplicity, severity and modesty. He was the leanest and most well-braced of Army Commanders, with the gait of a Divisional Commander and the determination of a Regimental Commander.

And Voropayev could see him wrinkling his fair brows and tapping his map with a pencil as he listened to the hurried report of the

Corps Commander who, in a high-pitched voice and smiling, as he always did no matter what he was reporting—was informing him about the breach.

Voropayev could see the Chief of Staff, that giant, lying full length across the map with a telephone receiver at his left ear, gripping it so tightly that his knuckles grew white.

An artist who intended to paint his portrait would have to paint him in this posture as being the most characteristic of him at any hour of a fighting day.

He also saw a General who had been a private and a private who was a professor and a member of the Military Council, a man whom the entire army was in love with.

"And Nikita Alexeyevich, I suppose, was in front, as always," mused Voropayev about the Corps Commander with whom he had served as Political Officer, and his heart was filled with envy of those who were out there and with pity for himself.

What a hurrying and scurrying, what tension there must now be at Rayevsky's headquarters! He himself, no doubt, having had no sleep for three days and nights, hoarse, but as merry as ever, was, as always, "sitting on the neck" of one of the Divisional Commanders,

or even a Regimental Commander, relating anecdotes which an hour later became known in the companies, and jotting in his notebook observations and impressions that he would use in his evening order to the corps.

Voropayev's eyes were wet with tears.

"That life will never come back again, I will not see any of them," and, sighing bitterly, he gazed at the road in order to tear himself away from those visions, but they stood out more clearly and vividly than ever.

Creaking and rocking, the truck raced along the winding highway. In the empty and light body of the truck Voropayev was shaken up, and this, his cough, and perhaps also hunger, made him feel a little sick. It was quite dark by now. It looked as though the mountains had descended into the valley and clouds had piled up on their summits, while the sea crawled on the lower edge of the sky, which was splashed with the small dots of the first, as still dim, stars.

The wind whistled and howled, but for all that the air was sweet, cold and windily-sweet. Its sweetness made one's moist hands sticky. It was like the airy distillation of flowers. It was like a recollection of long bygone youth.

"And Shura, in her stiffly-starched, rustling, but already bloodstained robe, must be somewhere in a regiment, or battalion, or at some mad river crossing, where she must have gone with a medical reinforcement group to assist the feldshers, and is already 'cutting and stitching' somebody amidst the crash and roar of falling bombs."

And as vividly as a flash of lightning Voropayev recalled his first meeting with Goreva, a meeting that was surprising and rare because of its peculiarly beautiful wartime setting.

That was.... Now when was it?... In the spring, yes, yes, in the spring, in the Ukraine, somewhere on the lower Dnieper. He was returning to his division after recovering from his third wound and a jam at the crossing had held him up at a riverside village.

The Germans never left the crossing in peace and every now and again it was put out of commission. While it was being repaired after one of the frequent bombings, Voropayev had got out of his jeep to disperse a supply column, ordering the drivers to scatter in the back yards and vegetable plots.

Suddenly he heard the polite whistle of a bomb right by his side, as it had then appeared to him. He scarcely managed to drop flat to

the ground when an explosion occurred—not by his side, it is true, but quite near for all that—and then came a clattering and rumbling as if something were breaking down. He raised his head and—this happens, probably only once in a lifetime, probably only once in a dream—saw right in front of him, across the street, the wall of an adobe house slowly collapsing. It crashed, sending up a cloud of dust, and exposed the interior. There, somebody in a white robe stooped swiftly to cover somebody lying in front so as to protect him from falling wreckage. As soon as the first shock passed, the wounded men, of whom there were many lying and sitting around the house, gave a loud cheer.

"Now that's what I call a surgeon! Bravo, she's a real brick, bravo!" came from all sides, and only then did Voropayev, who had not yet recovered his wits, realize that in the room of which the wall had collapsed, was a young woman surgeon, standing in front of an operating table, her face flushed with excitement. She had been performing an operation and when the explosion occurred she had stooped over her patient to protect him with her body, unaware that the wall had collapsed behind her and that she was exposed to the view

of the whole street. Only for an instant did she turn to glance at the street and at once proceeded to complete the operation. She was assisted by two girls. When the operation was successfully accomplished, these two girls carried the patient somewhere to the back of the house and, as if it were the stage of an open-air theatre, a Red Army man with a hastily-bandaged foot hobbled into the room with the aid of a stick.

The men in the street were still excitedly discussing the event when Voropayev entered the room and with a very determined air insisted that the operating room be immediately transferred to some other place.

"But you see what is going on," answered the woman wearily. "Look how many wounded there are. Where am I to take them?"

And, indeed, she would, no doubt, have continued dressing wounds and performing operations right here had not Voropayev appealed to the wounded men themselves for their assistance, and the surgeon, with her instruments, was immediately transferred to a surviving house a block or two away.

Her face had not made much impression on Voropayev that afternoon. She looked old and wan from a thick layer of dust on her

face, her hair was grey and grimy, and her eyes were spotted, like a cat's, shallow and not serious.

The only thing about Goreva that had astonished him that afternoon was her fortitude, which any seasoned soldier might have envied. But when he went to see her next morning to have his wounded hand rebandaged and recalled the event of the preceding day, he was amazed at, and at first could not believe, the posterlike, haunting beauty of her face and whole figure, masterful, commanding, and at once conspicuous.

Dostoyevsky wrote somewhere: "At the first impression I reluctantly took a liking to her." This is exactly what happened to Voropayev. A week later they were already fast friends, and a week after that, people began to talk quietly about them as future husband and wife, although they themselves were not thinking of marriage. She was a beautiful, and what is more important, a clever woman. A clever person never becomes a bore or uninteresting, and everything would have gone on as it had begun, along the course that had already been determined, had not Voropayev received his fourth wound—a severe one this time. The moment he heard that *she* had am-

putated his leg he realized that, having become disabled, the previous relationships between them could not be resumed . . . that he could never picture himself as being anything else than her patient, certainly not her husband. And besides, who would want to bother with a companion in life who suffered from consumption and a sick liver? An old love would not have been scared by this; a new one may not stand the test. Furthermore, it was unpleasant for a man to start life in the position of one who needed a nurse.

This last wound compelled Voropayev to seek a different life, different from the one he had led, and not with the one with whom he had thought of living. . . .

It was then that the idea had occurred to him of going South and all that silly stuff about a house and an orchard, although it was not so very silly, for after all, he was really very sick and his son on the verge of sickness, both were invalids, and for both there opened the prospect of a new, unknown and—who could tell?—a happy life. But he had no choice.

Again and again Voropayev gazed at the sea and admired the mountains in order to divert his thoughts and for a time he succeeded

in doing so. In this respect, the South is a wonderful healer. It compels a man not only to take notice of nature, but feel himself in her embrace. Nowhere do you feel that you have eyes, legs, lungs, a nose and ears as much as you do in the South, in the mountains, or by the sea. You look at the sails and at the stars as if they were old friends whom you have not met for a long time in the North. You are capable of speaking with a tree that you pass and asking what had become of the charming wistaria you had met about ten years ago and which you remembered all your life. It is only in the South, perhaps, that man not only battles with nature and vanquishes her, but is in his turn entirely vanquished by her and controlled by certain wonderful, capricious laws of her own.

Voropayev gazed at everything that came racing towards him with a feeling of intense uneasiness, as if he were about to recognize a familiar creature in the cavalcade of rocks, trees, bushes and birds that galloped past him, and call to it in order to take it along with him on his journey.

His thoughts also turned to Korytov; the awkward way they became acquainted, and then that heated discussion which had at once

put them up against each other. It was unpleasant to think of that now. What the devil had prompted him to start that debate? But first impressions are rarely correct, and probably Korytov was a much better man than he had appeared to be in the first hours of their acquaintance. In spite of that, Voropayev could not get rid of his feeling of dislike for that garrulous administrator.

"It was a mistake to have had any business with him! A mistake!..."

And the thought that Korytov was going to give him a lot more trouble yet made him feel still more desolate and lonely.

The mist raced between the trees in clumps leaving light-grey trails in the branches. Mist, mist, nothing but mist everywhere. The young oaks wore it in their yellowish, metallic sounding crowns like ragged shepherds' cloaks, and the cornel and hawthorn bushes wore them like kerchiefs. Even the yellowish grass clutched at its white strands and clothed itself in its rags. Something drove the clouds from the mountains and they raced down through the gorges into the valleys; but here they encountered the sea, pulled up sharp, galloped along the road and halted, quivering and rolling with the slightest motion of the air.

And, becoming moist, the colours intermingled.

A dark-red mountain, spotted like the dry rind of a pomegranate, covered another, dark blue, like a wave on a midsummer day, succulent, soft, lacking outline; the blue one coloured the gorge that ran by the side, rising a deeper blue into the sky and colouring it, tinting the borders of the dark-red mountain in front and casting dusky shadows over it. The colours rolled, bubbled like a spring, vanished and reappeared in other places.

"I want to live, never have I wanted to live so much as I do now, but I could not do otherwise than the way it has turned out. I am a father, I must bring up my boy, and I am sick, weak, infirm, I am of no use to anybody, I am a burden. Forgive me, Shura, forgive and forget," were the thoughts that ran through his mind, mingled with dry tears.

"It's going to be hard," he said aloud, and he even winced at the repugnant spasm of fear that gripped his whole being. "At forty-three, and in my condition . . . oh, it's going to be hard . . . to start everything again from the beginning, everything . . . and I haven't much strength, my strength exists only in my imagination."

And for the first time he regretted that he had remained alive. Frightful weariness overcame him; he trembled and his head swam as from an attack of fever. Oh, how lonely he was! . . .

* * *

The *Pobeda* Sovkhoz was famous for its wines. Formerly a private estate, it had been enlarged by amalgamation with a number of smaller vineyards and had become a sort of practical scientific institute, a wine research laboratory, where every labourer was in his way a scientist. Several sovkhozes of this type constituted one of the most famous syndicates in the country.

Every Sunday a scientific conference was held at the *Pobeda* Sovkhoz.

If there was nothing of particular importance on the agenda, Shirokogorov, the wine expert, a scientist in this field, would deliver a talk in order to maintain interest in the "conference." Even the children came to hear him, because his lectures were as fascinating as fairy tales. This was the case on that Sunday when Voropayev, cursing himself for having left his knapsack with the canned food at home, rolled up to the grey building of the

sovkhoz offices in the truck which had given him a lift. He was shivering with cold and he would have been glad to go to bed immediately.

"Is the Chief in?" he enquired of a barefooted little girl who ran past.

"The Chief?... No! He's at the lecture!" And proudly straightening her thin little body, she ran to the clubhouse.

Voropayev followed her.

In a large, cleanly-whitewashed room, about fifty people, seated on all imaginable kinds of chairs and stools, were listening attentively to a venerable-looking old man with a short grey beard and childish blue eyes which seemed to be always smiling, or at all events, shining with rapture. He was not lecturing, but just talking, not on any set subject, but in answer to the questions that were put to him every now and again by members of the audience. Voropayev found this so interesting that he took out his notebook and jotted down the questions.

Old Shirokogorov, Voropayev guessed that it was he, quietly answered all the questions without exception, and when no more were asked, he dealt with an anonymous note sent up by a shy girl student apprentice. This note

gave him occasion to speak about the collection of medicinal herbs by schoolchildren and Young Pioneers. He quoted such interesting figures that Voropayev was simply amazed. He hurriedly jotted the figures in his notebook and listened to what Shirokogorov was saying without missing a word, although the pangs of hunger he felt were as painful as a wound.

Shirokogorov spoke about child hunters for medicinal herbs and child fur-animal hunters, about the healing properties of herbs, and how easily and simply the children living at the *Pobeda* Sovkhoz could help the state. And he put it all in such a way that it sounded as though he were speaking about the beauty of human life and the joy of sound health. His speech was free and easy and yet capricious, like poetry. You could listen to him without end.

* * *

"Excuse me, Comrade Colonel . . ." Voropayev turned quickly at the sound of the voice, blinking his still sleepy eyes.

"What, what?"

"The lecture is over and we are closing the room. Have you any business with somebody here?"

A broad-shouldered, heavily-moustached man in a blue twill suit (a tunic, riding breeches and cap) was looking in surprise at Voropayev and with a gesture inviting him to the door. His face, not shaved for a long time, but round and fresh for all that, looked troubled.

"Yes, yes. Of course . . . I want to see the director," mumbled Voropayev in confusion, entangling his artificial leg with the leg of the stool he was sitting on, ashamed of having fallen asleep, ashamed of his helplessness, and of the foolish figure he must have cut.

"In that case, come with me. I am Chumandrin, the director," and the man in blue moved towards the door.

It was very good indeed that he went on in front, thus enabling Voropayev to recover from his confusion. Of course, it was silly of him to have fallen asleep in the middle of the lecture. That is what he began the conversation with as he entered the director's office, a large but cosy room, lined with bookshelves and samples of wine in various shaped bottles.

"To come here to make the acquaintance of Shirokogorov and to fall asleep at his lecture! Scandalous, simply scandalous!" he said with a smile and gesture of contrition.

Chumandrin toyed with a bunch of keys in his hand and with an air of indifference, evidently waiting for the stranger to give more information about himself, turned the pages of a document that was lying on his desk.

Voropayev did not attempt to try his patience.

"Korytov sent me here."

"Are you Voropayev? Korytov sent us a note about you," said the director with a slight smile. "How do you do? Why didn't you enquire for me as soon as you arrived?" he asked suspiciously, although without any particular interest.

"Korytov sent you a note about me?"

"Yes."

"When did he manage to do that?"

"The driver of the truck you came in brought it. We have been waiting for you for two hours. . . . I am afraid you have missed supper." Chumandrin glanced through the window and whistled with chagrin as he guessed from certain signs that the dining room was already closed. "Never mind, we'll arrange somehow, like in camp. Korytov writes that you have not even taken travellers' ration cards with you. That's a pity. Well, come and see the old man, he's waiting for you."

Chumandrin spoke rapidly, passing from one subject to another as if hurrying to go somewhere, and Voropayev found it hard to follow the drift of his remarks.

"Won't it be awkward after this disgrace?"

"Why should it be awkward?"

"What's the meaning of this?" Voropayev asked himself as they walked down a long, dark corridor. "What's this strange solicitude on Korytov's part? What's behind it? Caution or consideration for me? Caution, most likely. To warn them of my coming so as to avoid surprise, and on the other hand to remind me, in case, that the chiefs have their eyes open."

But in spite of himself, Korytov's unexpected consideration touched him.

"Tell me, Comrade Chumandrin, did Shirokogorov notice that I was asleep?"

"It was he who guessed where you were to be found, otherwise you would have been locked up in that clubroom until the morning.... Never mind, we'll get some refreshment soon. Go quietly, the old man is listening to the communiqué. There's a threshold here, don't trip over it.... This is Voropayev. Get acquainted."

An old man in a blue suit rose out of a deep armchair.

"How do you do?... We have broken through northeast of Budapest.... Please, sit down in that armchair. Let's listen."

Shirokogorov's office was furnished with prewar luxury. The carpets on the floor, the walls lined with books, the massive oak table on the edges of which lay piles of books and magazines, some with blue paper bookmarks and others open at the desired places, the divan and armchair, and next to them the small round table on which lay some albums, the showcase with ornate bottles of wine, and lastly, the skilfully executed photographic panorama "Grape Harvest" and the lamp with the magnificent shade—all seemed to serve as a setting for the figure of Shirokogorov. The old man was of short stature, but of fine, artistic build. His face resembled that of Anatole France, with a small, grey-pointed beard and clever, kind and always smiling eyes. Gracefully perched on his grey locks was a black silk skullcap. His hands were sinewy, sunburnt and very mobile. His long, lean fingers were in constant motion, all the time relating something, asking something, perhaps expressing perplexity. Looking at them, one could unerringly divine what the old man was thinking.

But the chief thing about him was not his hands, but his look, not his merry, aged eyes, but precisely his look, which from time to time seemed to raise the old man out of his armchair in all his formidable (which he was not) height and present him in all his grandeur.

It was the look of a great General. An absurd idea flashed through Voropayev's mind, and several times he caught himself wanting to stand to attention under the old man's searching gaze.

Switching off the radio, Shirokogorov turned with youthful briskness to Voropayev and said:

"How do you account for it, my dear Colonel?... No, no! Don't try to excuse yourself.... We get a note from Gennadi Alexandrovich saying: 'A famous lecturer has left here for your place straight from the front. Make use of him....' Well, we don't need a lot of persuading. We make the necessary arrangements, inform the audience ... don't wave your arms at me, you'll cause a draught and I'll catch cold ... and there he was, sleeping the sleep of the just!"

"I was so tired and chilled, and—I'm speaking honestly—I was so absorbed with your lecture...."

"No excuses will help you, my dear Colonel, although I fully believe you. I myself become irresistibly sleepy in a new place.... There is only one way in which you can atone for your sin: have a bite, drink some wine and stand in front of that map and talk to us to your heart's content about what's going on at the front."

It would have been absurd to refuse.

"First of all, inform us sinners about Budapest, Colonel...."

And that is how Voropayev's acquaintance with the celebrated Shirokogorov began.

After hastily swallowing a plate of boiled rice without butter, which Chumandrin brought in, and gulping down a glassful of excellent Riesling, Voropayev felt in splendid form. There was something strongly reminiscent of the front about that evening and he eagerly clutched at these pleasant features of his vague future.

Voropayev understood the Danube operation perfectly and was now able to prove that he was not only an excellent lecturer but also a well-informed eyewitness and participant, or almost such.

In Voropayev's opinion, the battle of the Danube, conducted by the Second and Third

Ukrainian Fronts, was one of the biggest complex-manoeuvring and most sanguinary battles ever fought. Here, offensive operations were complicated by menacing outflanking and encircling movements. It was a fight for the Danube. Heroic crossings and still more heroic retreats back across the river were interspersed with unexpected defensive battles which grew into sieges—and all this with increasing tempo, increasing magnitude and increasing staunchness on the part of the men. It was at once a mountain-river and steppe-forest battle in which cavalry, landing troops, paratroop and sapper-diversionist forces could all be employed, in which the skill and fortitude of the troops were put to the fiercest test, for it was necessary simultaneously to attack and defend, push forward and dig in, to be surrounded and feel that you are surrounding, to fall wounded and still implacably push on westward.

A clock somewhere in the corridor struck eleven.

Voropayev was soon carried away by his own story. The war became vividly alive in front of his eyes. After finishing with the Hungarian theatre of war, he passed on to Czechoslovakia, gave his personal impressions of Rumania and touched slightly upon events

in Athens (only a day or two before a state of siege had been proclaimed there). He recalled the morning of the thirty-first of August when he raced into Bucharest standing on the armour of a tank. His head swam with joy. Plump, black-eyed Rumanian women clambered up the sides of the tank to kiss the men on it. Voropayev's face was smudged with lipstick and looked as if it had been mauled. Had he been wounded that day he certainly would not have felt the pain.

"But the most magnificent, most sacred, the unrepeatable day was the sixteenth of September."

"That was . . . wait a minute. . . ."

"When we entered Sofia. . . ."

"Yes, of course, excuse me. . . ."

Voropayev filled a wineglass. His hand trembled. Drops of the transparent wine trickled slowly down his finger to his palm.

"May God inspire the one who leaves posterity a monument to that day."

Shirokogorov and Chumandrin also filled their glasses.

"I could not restrain my emotion when I read the reports from that front," said the professor.

"Emotion!" exclaimed Voropayev, interrupting him. "There isn't a word to define

exactly what took place. I was Russia, do you understand? I bore on my shoulders the ten centuries that had separated us. I still think that my name is known all over Sofia and that I know the whole of the city. On my word of honour. . . ."

Voropayev went on speaking, every now and again taking a sip from his glass, which was kept filled by silent Chumandrin, on whose face played all the shades of bliss. And the more Voropayev drank the more he wanted to speak, and the more interestingly and inspired did he speak.

Shirokogorov, stroking his little beard, threw in a question now and again, and to Chumandrin's lot fell only a slight pause during which, pouring out the wine, he managed to interject.

"By God, when you talk to people you do learn a lot. . . ."

Later, when he had almost completely lost his voice, Voropayev briefly, and in a humorous tone, related—in answer to the question thrice put to him by Shirokogorov—how he had come to meet Korytov, about his house-hunting experiences, about his son, whom he was to bring from Moscow soon, and about his loneliness. He expressed the conviction that

he would never again know the happiness that he had possessed when fighting in the ranks of the army.

"I fell out of happiness as from an airplane. I have left everything out there—glory, my comrades ... everything, everything, but Korytov did not even help me to get a house."

As the house question was not a military or scientific, but by its very nature an organizational question, Chumandrin deemed it opportune to take it up with the ease with which the other two had taken up questions they were competent to deal with. With an expression of vexation on his face, he said in a low voice:

"Good Lord, fancy not being able to find a country house! ... Listen to me, Voropayev, I'll find you a house! Three if you like! Today, or at the latest tomorrow, at ten in the morning. But will you come to work for me? No, you tell me first, will you come or not?"

Leaning over towards Shirokogorov in a conspiratorial manner, determined, like all tipsy people, to clinch a deal as soon as it is proposed, he whispered to him hoarsely:

"Just the same we're going to release ... what's his name? ... that ginger fellow ... for promotion. That means that I will be left here without an assistant, like an Arab in the

desert. . . . Isn't that so, Sergei Konstantinovich? And then . . . we have no club manager. . . ." Catching the look of approval on the old man's serene face he, still leaning over the table, gripped Voropayev's artificial leg and gave it such a slap with his heavy hand as to make it creak and said, wagging his head threateningly: "This is utterly absurd! I'll telephone the Regional Committee about it, right now! Such a fine speaker, a man with immense Party experience, and they go and appoint him as a propagandist!" Suddenly he straightened up and laughed, widely parting his wine-stained lips.

"And the main thing is, he didn't get a house after all! . . . Did you hear that, Sergei Konstantinovich? . . . He didn't! . . . He's a nice one, is that Korytov!"

"Gennadi Alexandrovich is a clever man, but clever men make mistakes sometimes," observed Shirokogorov guardedly. Being non-Party, he felt delicate about such matters and disliked hearing disparaging remarks about responsible Party workers.

"Your Korytov didn't seem to me at all businesslike," Voropayev blurted out with unnecessary acerbity and downright tactlessness, but he condemned himself the moment he said

it and even swore at himself almost aloud for this unforgivable lack of restraint.

"Your people are having a hard time here," he said, hastening to rectify his blunder.

"Where are they not having a hard time?" retorted Chumandrin through his clenched teeth, hurriedly filling the glasses. "The people find it hard everywhere nowadays. There's a war on! Korytov's people find it hard too, and I suppose it was not easy for your people at the front."

Sitting well back in his broad armchair, Shirokogorov leisurely brought the fingers of both his hands together and put them to his lips, one pair after another, as if perseveringly testing their sensitiveness. His fine, wise eyes gazed pugnaciously at Voropayev, challenging him to immediate battle.

"To win a war like this without things being hard?" he said in a tone of slight surprise. "People who think that everything is easy ought to be condemned as slackers.... Yes, slackers and rascals ...because who can find it easy? Only rascals and scoundrels...." He placed his elbows on the armrests and moving his hands in front of his mouth as if blowing on them he addressed himself directly to Voropayev: "Did you find things easy, my

dear Colonel? Is it only because of Korytov that things are hard? And are they hard only here?"

The conversation, becoming heated and stormy, turned to the hardships of wartime conditions—and what did they not discuss at that late hour?

Chumandrin, chuckling and snapping his fingers with delight, kept on filling the glasses and repeating a phrase from an anecdote that must have been very funny and one he had long remembered:

"Write, Karapet, you know the style!"

Soon Voropayev caught himself repeating this silly phrase and even begging Shirokogorov to pronounce it, but the latter politely but firmly refused.

"A drink or two doesn't hurt a good man," said Voropayev, patting Shirokogorov on the shoulder. "What do you think?"

He was now living "aloud," as it were, wool outside, like a glove turned inside-out; all his feelings were exposed, nothing was concealed.

"To blazes with you, I want to go to bed!" he said, to himself, as he thought, but for some reason Chumandrin jumped up, put his arm round his shoulder and led him out.

"Write, Karapet, you know the style!" said Voropayev with a wave of his arm, and both chuckled, for what reason nobody could tell.

* * *

He was awakened by something hot stroking his face. The light-blue curtain divided the big window crosswise and everything in the room bore a golden-bluish hue almost as on a moonlit night, and bluish rivulets streamed and flowed on the dazzling white ceiling, but did not flow away. He did not at once realize that the sea was peeping through the window and that it was the sun that had stroked his face, but the moment he realized it he jumped up and hastily dressed.

In that instant he heard the voice and footsteps of Chumandrin:

"Good morning. Did you sleep well? Do you see the scenery we've arranged for you? Doesn't it tempt you? How's your head?"

"Your wine drove all business out of it," answered Voropayev. "Actually, I came here to talk to you about the kolkhozes Korytov instructed me to visit."

"So you intend to go?"

"I must."

"Well, you know best. But that's your

house, over there. Look," and Chumandrin's fat finger picked out of the landscape a narrow, oblong white house that resembled a high-tension box, or a pigeon house. "Paradise, eh?... So I tell you—what the hell do you want Korytov for? Come and work for me and live here as long as you like."

"Had I met you the day before yesterday, Fyodor Ivanovich, I would have become your slave for life. But now, I can't. It would not be the right thing...."

"It's not the right thing to steal money, or to be unfaithful to your wife. But look! There's another vacant house, higher up, as if it were on a cliff. Can you see it? That's a larger one. I can lease it to you. Let's come to an agreement. Bring your son here, and invite guests to the housewarming. I'll give you a fifteen years' lease, by God I will."

"Believe me, Fyodor Ivanovich, I can't."

"What's the matter with you? I'm not wishing you any harm, or persuading you to steal?"

"I will be ashamed to meet Korytov again. I can't. I know you want to do for me exactly what I will not be able to do for myself, but I can't. I would be going against my conscience."

"But what has changed in your condition during these two days? If you were deserting the district altogether I could understand. But wait. I am not forcing you to stay. Come and have breakfast and at least hear something about your kolkhozes."

"No, I won't stay for breakfast. I'll go at once."

"Well, as you please. Incidentally, I don't have breakfast myself after a night's carouse. We had a lovely time last night, didn't we, eh? Your heart feels merrier!"

While escorting Voropayev to the highroad by the paths through the grounds he briefly told him about the kolkhozes to which he was hurrying.

According to what he said, the nearest kolkhoz, *Pervomaisky*, had scarcely been damaged by the Germans, but there were mostly new people there now, from the Kuban and the Don. The other two, *Kalinin* and *Mikoyan*, had been completely sacked, and the majority of the inhabitants had been driven to Germany. New people had come from other districts to take the place of those who had gone, but they frankly regretted having come here and were eager to return to their native homes.

"Why the hell did they settle here then? They knew where they were going, didn't they?"

"Didn't you know where you were going? Of course, you did. But did you manage to fix yourself up? No. It's the same with them. They were no cleverer than you were. Well, here's the highroad. Go straight on. Look in if you are passing this way."

"I certainly will."

"Think about that little house when your mind's free!"

"All right!"

"I'll keep it for you, do you hear?"

"All right!"

. . . The sun dazzled the eyes to blackness. The windows of the white pigeon house by the sea glittered like precious stones.

"Happiness was so near, so possible. . . ." Indeed, why shouldn't he go to work for that Chumandrin? Why not live in that wonderful pigeon house? Why should he sleep between other people's sheets in other people's rooms while working for Korytov?

"Absurd, how utterly absurd! . . ."

After all, he came here precisely for the purpose of recuperating, to regain his strength, and it was precisely for this purpose that he

was given leave in Moscow, so he would be doing nothing mean if he left Korytov....

After all, he did not hurry here and pledge himself to Korytov for the rest of his life; he had come temporarily, to regain his health, to get on his feet, and to return to any kind of work if he won the battle for himself. If he did not win, or if the battle dragged on for many years, he would not be able to do anything even for Korytov.

"By God, its quixotic," he repeated aloud several times and vowed that he would go and see Chumandrin on his way back and reach an agreement with him; but at the back of his mind there was the thought that, of course, he would not go and see Chumandrin, because that would be absolutely mean, even if it did not appear to be so on the surface. This thought vanquished his resentment at the way he had been treated, and it vanquished the vow he had just taken. Things like that happen in life and you can't do anything about it!

The day before, in spite of his tussle with Korytov, he had felt sorry for this man who was worn out by hard work, and it seemed a shameful thing to desert him now, after he had seen for himself how difficult the situation was here.

"No! I must help him. I'll help him a little and then go, so that he'll have no excuse for saying I was a 'tourist.' "

He did not have far to go, and the easy road and the inspiring morning distracted his thoughts from the problem of arranging his life.

He walked on looking around humourously as if intending to purchase a site.

"Oh, what a beautiful little house could be built here!" he exclaimed aloud, halting and gazing with confused emotion in front of a steep, red, flat crag, which, glancing from the turn in the road, seemed ready to leap into the sea.

Without a moment's thought he named it "Eagle Peak," and indeed, the crag looked like a fabulous mountain eagle's nest. Timid and tender birds could not live here because of the piercing wind and the bareness of the place. Two or three tamarisks, mutilated by the inclement elements, and a humped pine tree clinging to the rock were the only inhabitants of this bare crag.

"What an eagle's view! . . . How is it that nobody in ancient times thought of building a castle or a monastery here?. . ."

He stood there for about twenty minutes, oblivious to everything, mentally building

"Eagle Palace," with steps cut into the rock right down to the sea, with a huge garden, and with terraces running down to the shore. "Just the place for a house for happy people," he mused, and he searched in his mind for somebody he could recommend this place to. . . .

Of course, it would have pleased him best to build a house for himself on Eagle Peak. But no, he would not have done so. There are dimensions that kill personal comfort. This crag could shelter only Prometheus, and if not Prometheus, then only many, many multitudes. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

The general meeting of the kolkhoz had been going on for over four hours.

The chairman, a tall, hollow-waisted man, the curve of whose fleshy back gave it the appearance of a Cossack saddle, was on the platform waving a batch of medical certificates relieving the recipients from heavy work and tearfully pleading with everybody to turn out to hoe the vines as it was already almost too late.

Silence reigned in the small hall as if the audience were asleep.

Outside, the wind howled piercingly, drowning the speaker's voice. Pandemonium reigned in the crooked, dingy lanes that served here as streets.

The wind lashed people's eyes and made them gasp for breath. The ground slipped from under their feet, and there was such a screeching and howling in the air as if

some living thing were being tormented up above.

The new settlers found it hard and dull living here. And, good Lord, what was the use of talking about hoeing when many of the people in this village were shivering with malaria, were tortured with rheumatism and by all sorts of discomforts of the new life, so many that they could not be counted!

Of course, the village doctor was right in his way in giving the kolkhozniks disablement certificates and sick leave, but for all that, Voropayev could barely restrain himself from abusing that zealous priest of the healing art who, happily, was sitting rather far away from him, at the other end of the chairman's table.

Suddenly Voropayev vaguely heard somebody addressing him. He hastily closed the notebook in which he was sketching aimless curves and smilingly looked round at the audience.

The kolkhoz chairman was standing half-turned towards him and asking, apparently not for the first time, what on earth could be done with these people who had no feeling for anything.

At this moment Voropayev had not a single idea in his mind, but he had no choice. He

rose with a sigh and, licking his dry lips, stepped with creaking leg to the edge of the platform.

That strange silence continued to reign in the hall.

* * *

Voropayev's face was suffused with a tingling flush. He coughed. This was the extremest thing he could permit himself to do.

"Are there any war veterans here?" he enquired in a hoarse voice, not clear in his own mind what he wanted to ascertain by asking that question.

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . ." answered several sleepy, reluctant voices.

"Well then, let's have a look at you. Let's see what you are like. Come and sit here, friends, in the front row."

Listlessly and hesitantly the war veterans moved up to the front.

"What about the soldiers' wives, are they to remain at the back?" came a shrill voice from the rear of the hall accompanied by a low, saucy chuckle from several of the women.

Suddenly, without rhyme or reason, Voropayev began to tell the audience that on get-

ting up in the morning to come here he couldn't find his leg and had caught fright, thinking that somebody had stolen it.

Whether because of the change of subject, or because the story really sounded funny, the people brightened up, wriggled in their seats and leaned forward.

After relating two or three episodes, purely imaginary to illustrate how difficult it was for a man just returned from the front to understand at once what was going on here, Voropayev told them in humorous terms what their kolkhoz looked like to him as an outsider. He piled on the colours and was not afraid to make invidious comparisons. The place began to hum long before he had finished.

The men who had been smoking in the outer room streamed into the hall and crowded in the gangway, preventing the people in the back rows from hearing. Cries of protest were raised. The war veterans sitting in the front seats, constituting with the speaker in the army tunic with three rows of ribbons and four wound stripes the camp of order, turned round and sh-shed in the endeavour to restore silence.

Voropayev was forced to stop, to draw his breath, but a deep intuition, that subtle sense

that we sometimes call subconsciousness, urgently prompted him not to wait, to attack without delay.

"Now then!... Silence! Keep in your places!"

Everybody remained stock-still as if petrified.

"Comrades, veterans, what does all this mean?" he began, raising his voice. "Did we fight at the front only in order to perish at home? Are you not ashamed to look on quietly at the behaviour of slackers, shirkers, boozers and ne'er-do-wells? Have you gone crazy? Or are your eyes clogged up, as they say where I come from? For five hours on end has this doubled-up beanstalk"—he contemptuously jerked his thumb backward over his shoulder in the direction of the chairman and then paused to allow the rolling wave of laughter to subside—"for five hours on end has this doubled-up beanstalk been standing in front of you, and you sit here quietly as if your lips have been sealed with pitch! What can he have to talk about when he has allowed the farm to go to rack and ruin, and when he tolerates in the place a doctor, so he calls himself, who is ready to give everybody a week's sick leave every time a pimple breaks

out on their backsides? This place is a pimple paradise, that's what it is!" (There was another burst of laughter, not because the joke was ribald, but because it hit the nail on the head. He felt this at once, and this emboldened him.) "This won't do! They did not work like this at Stalingrad, my dear comrades kolkhozniks. You, friend, what division were you in?" he pointedly asked a bloated-faced, sickly-looking veteran who wore the Defence of Stalingrad Medal.

"The Thirty-Ninth, Comrade Colonel!" answered the man, rising to attention and speaking as if he were either tongue-tied or a stammerer.

Voropayev had not fought in that division, but he knew perfectly well that, numerous as the divisions were at Stalingrad, pretty much the same episodes occurred in all of them, and as if he had been a frequent visitor to that Thirty-Ninth, he threw his arms forward and enquired gleefully:

"D'you remember Zakharchenko?... the radio operator. True, he wasn't in your division, but the whole of Stalingrad heard about him.... You must remember him! He's the one who, although wounded seven times, dived into the Volga again and again to fish out the

company radio installation and got his eighth wound while he was doing it.... And the main thing is, the man was thirty and had never learnt to swim, but in he went...."

"That wasn't Zakharchenko, it was Kolesnichenko"—blurted the tongue-tied Stalingrad veteran. "He was in our division, of course I knew him! He's a Hero of the Union, now! In our division, I tell you! Of course!"

"There was another case like that on the Dnieper"—came another voice, accompanied by the light tinkle of several Medals, above the rising hum of conversation.

The command post of the meeting imperceptibly shifted from the platform to the floor. Voropayev had to make haste. Descending by the narrow steps at the side (half a dozen arms were immediately stretched forth to help him) he took a seat in the hall and, surrounded by the war veterans, kept up an animated conversation with them.

"And what about Kiev, lads? Who of you were at the capture of Kiev? D'you remember the fighting there?... And Korsun-Shevchenkovsky? You were there, eh?... Shake hands, we are buddies for life!... Perhaps you were at Jassy?" he asked another man, putting his arm round his shoulder. "Perhaps you were

wounded there too? . . . Come on, let's give you a hug! . . . Who operated on you? Was it Goreva? That would have been a strange coincidence! . . . And you, lad, you seem to have got it worse than I did," and Voropayev again put his hand on the shoulder of the Stalingrad veteran with the pale, bloated face, who, as he had just noticed, had lost an arm and an eye.

"Knocked out t-t-ten t-t-times . . . but d-didn't d-d-die," answered the veteran with indescribable pride, stuttering convulsively. "And the devil won't take me the eleventh time. . . ."

"Where else have you been, Comrade Colonel? Were you at the capture of Belgrade?" came voices from all parts of the hall.

"Lads, whoever was at Sevastopol and at Stalingrad has been everywhere!"

"That's true! . . . When were you in Sevastopol? . . ."

"Another time, lads. Another time. I now proclaim this kolkhoz in a state of emergency. War veterans! Organize and lead assault groups. . . . Sick leave only for the dead. All the rest—forward—charge! . . . What's your name? Ogarnov? . . . Put their names down, Ogarnov! Quickly! Let's not lose a minute!

Surprise is half the battle won. D'you remember that?"

The Stalingrad veteran sprang up with a blissful look on his face, and just at the moment when it seemed that nothing could now check Voropayev's rapid mastery of the hearts of these people, when the smell of gunpowder was in the air, when all were a-bustle as before an attack and excited whispers were heard: "Spades!"... "Look alive!"... "Lights!"... "Where's the first assault group?" —a piercing feminine voice was heard, followed by a low rustling, and making straight for Voropayev, elbowing the war veterans aside, a woman pushed her way to the front and came to a halt, perspiring and panting, as if she had been running. She was a plump little woman with such insolently blue eyes that they made one feel awkward looking into them.

"Who are you, and where do you come from to be a plague on my head?" she shrieked. "D'you think I'll let my poor wounded man go?... You've made a mistake ... I won't!" and with that she put her arm round her husband, the man with the Stalingrad Medal; but he shamefacedly pushed her arm away....

"But will you let him be disgraced?" Voropayev barked at her. "You'll do nothing to prevent his military glory from being dragged in the mud?... Silence when I am speaking!... You are too late!... You should have pitied him before, but not now, when disgrace is staring us in the face.... Veterans, follow me!... Those who hold our honour dear will not desert us! Forward!" and raising his voice higher with every sentence he uttered and giving them the tone of an order, a command, he darted forward and, almost at a run, led the men out of the clubhouse into the darkness of the windy night.

It was extremely important not to slacken the tempo and not to lose the nervous enchantment of the fighting line that had been so luckily created, the force, the will power that had been conjured up by the magic words: "Attack, assault, forward, follow me!"

The wind was raging with all its might, the clouds raced across the sky eclipsing the moon, but for all that it was fairly light.

Voropayev stumbled several times and almost fell. A little thin shoulder leaned against his arm, and a rough little hand caught the sleeve of his greatcoat on the other side.

"You two will be my messengers! . . . What's your names?"

"I'm Styopka Ogarnov," said the little fellow who had propped him up with his shoulder, and the one who held his sleeve added:

"And I'm his mate, Vitka Sapega."

"Very well, Vitya. Run to the clubhouse and pull the red cloth off the table. We'll cut it up and make some flags. . . . Is there anybody here who can play the accordion?"

And at once came Vitya's voice, already from a distance:

"Yes! I'll fetch him!"

"We'll raise five flags! Present them to the five groups! Who here has carried the flag in an attack?"

"I have. At Novorossiisk. . . . And at Lvov too! . . ."

"From where did you march on Lvov?" came several voices.

"Well, so you know the business? . . . Arrange it, then. . . . Don't lose any time. We'll fight another battle. We'll show the stuff we're made of. . . . Close in!"

Now it was no longer the words, their meaning, but rather the tone, the force, the vocal emotion with which they were pronounced that had acquired the most importance. He

scarcely thought of what he was saying; he was concerned mainly with the way his voice sounded, and tried to feel whether it was leading the people or not.

Like stars racing across the sloping ground the lights of "storm lamps" flitted on the hillside. These were the team leaders running to get spades.

Noisily quarrelling with their husbands, the women took their places in front. An accordion struck up, it was evident that the player was running. The group commanders sang out as if on parade:

"Fi-r-st gr-o-up!..."

"That's my Dad," said Styopka Ogarnov with a sniff. "He's so mad, he's all of a tremble...."

"Sec-ond gr-o-up!..."

"That's uncle Yegorov, the sailor.... I hope he doesn't beat my Dad up. He's always chivying Dad. Showing off to my Mum, the sea devil!..."

Shouting, hallooing, and whistling and clapping, something that resembled the dawn appeared with noise and laughter in the distance, flitting between the black silhouettes of the trees. Lit up by a torch, a two-wheeled cart rolled past, loaded with a water barrel that

smelt of wine. And by its side, straddling to avoid tripping over pitfalls and turns, ran Ogarnov's wife, frantically waving the torch. On catching sight of Voropayev she laughed defiantly and beckoned to him:

"See how you've stirred us up? You thought the women would lag behind, didn't you? Not likely!... Drink this. Go on, don't keep me waiting! Drink it up! It won't make you drunk!"

Holding the torch, she allowed the low, smoky flame to light up her face like a conjuror in a circus; and indeed, something was expected of her—a conjuring trick or a heroic deed, the former rather than the latter.

"Who's first?... Who to battle doth lead will find happiness indeed!..."

Voropayev felt the thin little shoulder at his elbow tremble.

"She's a plucky little woman is your Mum," he hurriedly said to the boy to calm him.

"Aw-ful!" blurted Styopa, bursting with pride. He had been dreading a different opinion. "People here say that there ain't no one pluckier than her except the devil in hell...."

"I believe they're right," was the thought that flashed through Voropayev's mind. "She's

not like the heroine in Nekrasov's poem, it's true, but she too would stop a runaway horse and dash into a burning house.... How can the spirit of these women be accounted for?" But he had no time for further reflections.

The moon, escaping from the pursuing clouds, lit up the vine-clad hill. The assault groups plunged their spades and hoes into the ground, and here and there the sound of picks was heard.

The vines were of all sorts of shapes and sizes—small, shrivelled, branched like the antlers of a deer, or strict and straight like a seven-armed candelabrum. They looked like living beings only pretending to be plants.

Voropayev could distinctly see what was going on around him. The work was not hard, but the main thing was that it was jolly. Like everything unexpected, this night expedition enabled the people to see themselves from an aspect they had rarely seen themselves before, and this seemed to be the most important and valuable, for, digging in the dark, the hoeing at this moment could not have been very efficient.

* * *

First thing in the morning Voropayev went to visit the war veterans who had not been at the meeting the evening before.

The first one he visited was Senior Lieutenant Boyarishnikov, who had only recently been discharged from active service.

"Hello!" shouted the Lieutenant from behind the door. "Who's there?"

"May I come in?" enquired Voropayev, entering the house.

"You can try, why not?" came the surly reply from the depth of the room. "Ah! It's you, Comrade! On what business?"

"Perhaps you'll permit me to sit down?"

"Yes, why not? Only I want you to understand that I play no role here. I suppose you want the kolkhoz office. . . ."

Voropayev removed his cap and wiped his perspiring brow.

"I already know that you play no role here. More's the pity. It would be better if you did. What part of the front did you fight on?"

Boyarishnikov frowned and bringing his arm down with a sweep, said:

"That trick won't work on me. I've seen demagogues before."

But there was something in Voropayev's glance that compelled him to answer his question.

"On the part I was ordered to. I'm not obliged to report to everybody who comes along, to go round and tell everybody. You are not familiar with army regulations, Comrade Colonel."

Voropayev continued to stare at him with bated breath as if looking at something amazing, and the persistence of that mute question must have cowed Boyarishnikov.

"I guarded the enemies of our country. What, you don't like it? No, I saw no fighting, I have not been wounded, nor injured, I am just sick. You needn't stare at me like that, Comrade Colonel. No, and I haven't got any big Medals—but my conscience is clear."

But his conscience was not at all clear. He obstinately kept on talking instead of maintaining a resentful silence.

"It's no use you trying to bluff me, brother, I've seen a thing or two," he blurted, sweeping his arm up and down for emphasis. His thoughts could not branch out in subordinate clauses, they were short, like wooden pegs. His inability to use his language, his contempt for the free-flowing variety of phrase that is characteristic of Russian speech and constitutes its greatest charm, caused Voropayev to detest this retired bureaucrat, whose

whole character ran against the Soviet grain, although he may have been an honest man as far as he could be. He decided to test him by playing on his vanity.

"Don't be angry, Boyarishnikov," he said in an apologetic tone. "I haven't come to tell you how awkward it was that you kept away from all the rest last night, and still more awkward to express opposition to the special drive I organized.... No, I haven't come for that. I've come on an entirely different matter. Wouldn't you like to be chairman of the kolkhoz?"

Boyarishnikov was frankly amazed at this proposal, and every wrinkle on his frightened face expressed it.

"The chairman?"

"Yes, chairman of the kolkhoz."

"No-o thanks!" he answered insolently, now looking with contempt at Voropayev. "No-o, no that doesn't suit me...."

"Why?"

"My nerves wouldn't allow it. Besides, I've already made arrangements with a building organization near here...."

He said this with grand dignity, as if he were about to become a head official in the Republic.

"That's a pity," said Voropayev, getting up and putting on his sweat-moistened cap. "A great pity. When you come up for expulsion from the Party, you'll not have a single trump in your hand."

"Yes I will. Keep well. I'll lay a complaint against you for overdoing things. Who ever heard of special drives being organized in kolkhozes? This way, this way, further to the left, that's right. Keep well!"

From Boyarishnikov—to the doctor.

But early in the morning the doctor had left on a truck that was going to town. He had gone to see Korytov, to lodge a complaint, evidently.

From the doctor's—to Ogarnov, who had not yet gone to bed.

In his holiday tunic, with his decorations and Medals pinned on all crooked, Ogarnov was carpingly dividing the people into brigades.

Yegorov, Gagarchenko and Pausov, their faces red, sleepy and swollen from the wind, called to each other by mere exclamations without taking their makhorka cigarettes out of their mouths. Everybody looked gloomy and strained. The night engagement was still in progress.

Last night Yegorov had led the second assault group. He was now put in charge of the tobacco brigade. Of giant stature and with a face that expressed frank contempt for everything that came within his field of vision, he shook his head in disapproval. He was displeased with everything and regarded all those who were appointed to his brigade as shirkers.

Gagarchenko was attached to the vineyard brigade and Pausov to the vegetable brigade—the smallest.

"Whom will you put in charge of your first group?" enquired Voropayev, seeing that circumstances themselves had determined that Ogarnov should take general charge, and by his question openly approving of this arrangement.

"I've appointed my wife in my place, you know her...."

"Will she manage?"

"If she doesn't, we'll take her off the job," and Ogarnov blushed and smiled so shyly that everybody guessed at once that he would never dare do such a thing.

"I'll manage, no worse than you," she answered herself, peeping over the partition for a moment and smiled, exposing her un-

naturally white enamelled teeth. "Have you had your breakfast, Colonel? No! Then come in and I'll give you something to eat."

She cut a slice of bacon fat and pushed it towards him together with a pink plastics bowl containing pickled tomatoes and a tumbler full of red wine, which by the look of it was strong and sickly sweet.

"Now give your nerves a rest, Comrade Colonel," she said, smiling in a conspiratorial way. "I must have looked awful to you last night. Did I frighten you?"

And he, also in a conspiratorial way for some reason, nodded confirmation.

From Ogarnov—to the secretary of the Party organization.

"Have you any interesting people here?"

"As many as you like . . . only they are not subordinate to me."

"What do you mean?"

"Temporarily attached. What I mean is—visitors."

"Come along, let's have a look at 'em!"

Light, dishevelled, half-intoxicated showers were dropping now here and now there over the village. The ground was very slippery.

They stopped outside a small cottage, the windows of which were not glazed, but hung

with an army ground sheet, like at the front. Frowning and puffing out his cheeks, the secretary called:

"Podnebesko, Yuri!"

A woman answered in a frightened voice:

"In a minute, in a minute!"

They waited. A moment or two later, adjusting a woman's capote that he had hastily put on, a good-looking lad with a tousled, fair beard, the colour of faded peroxide, limped out of the house. His face looked so young that the beard seemed as if it had been stuck on.

Voropayev could not help smiling.

The secretary awkwardly introduced them to each other as if he were reconciling enemies and then scratched the back of his head, wondering what was going to happen next.

The bearded youth's eyes flashed.

"Was it you that started that shindy last night? A splendid idea, by God it was! If it hadn't been for the rain and my aching bones I would have joined you at once.... Natasha! Come here!"

A woman pushed the ground sheet aside, cautiously peeped out of the window and vanished in an instant. Voropayev noticed that she had nothing on but an underbodice.

"This is the comrade who organized the night assault, Natasha! This is my wife. I would invite you in, but...."

"No! You're crazy, Yuri!" the woman exclaimed in a fright.

"No, I'm saying," the husband interrupted, "I'd invite you in with great pleasure, but my pants are in the wash and I haven't another pair...you see what I'm wearing."

Voropayev slipped his greatcoat off his shoulders.

"Return the capote to your wife, put my coat on and let me into the house. I have business with you."

* * *

They were so poverty-stricken that the face powder at the bottom of a box with a foreign label standing on the edge of a stool seemed a luxury here.

The story of their lives could be eloquently related by her dented, plywood suitcase and by his army greatcoat that served as the family blanket.

There are families which have suffered the grief of bereavement during the war but have gained honour and glory.

There are families which have not gained honour and glory, nor have they suffered bereavement.

There are families which have suffered the hardships of evacuation, of separation from their dear ones, and anxiety about their folks at the front, but have got off with nothing worse than greying temples.

But there are no few families which have suffered all the trials of the war, but have borne the blows that rained on them one after another with fortitude, surrendering neither their honour nor conscience, sparing neither their blood, their nerves, their tears nor their courage.

One day, in the Caucasian mountains, somewhere in North Ossetia, when the Thirty-Seventh Army was fighting there with its last ounce of strength, Voropayev saw a tree growing on a rock. The stormy winds had transformed this tree into an octopus. If the wind could assume some shape, it would assume the shape of this tree. It was a statue of the storm. Its trunk was split in two and bent in tortuous convulsions. Its branches were twisted like rope and restlessly, angrily, stretched away from the trunk, clutching at the air with its twigs that looked like crooked fingers.

The tree's whole being surged in the direction of the wind, and even its sparse, coarse leaves looked not towards the sun, but towards the path of the winds, ready at any moment to clutch at the next storm and fly away with it.

Young Podnebesko, and especially his wife, were very much like that mountain tree that had been reared solely by the inclement elements. Both were only twenty, and when they smiled their faces looked like those of children. But it was enough for them to get lost in thought and to lose control of their facial muscles for this youthful, blissful look to vanish and give way to a look of pain.

As Voropayev soon ascertained, Podnebesko had been wounded and injured several times. He had not quite recovered even now. And she, with her fine, gossamer hair that shimmered in the light and enveloped her head like a garland of golden feather grass, and the dark-blue—ultramarine—eyes of a happy girl, winced painfully from attacks of neglected polyneuritis and nervously smoked cigarette after cigarette.

Her arms were unnaturally thin, and whether she laughed or listened attentively, the expression of weariness never left her face.

But both gave one the impression of being

not only staunch, but talented and—as is the case with every true talent—one could detect in their features traits that had never existed before them.

"When were you discharged?" enquired Voropayev.

"I'm on indefinite leave for the time being."

"Have you come here to recuperate?"

"If I can."

She added sadly:

"He hasn't been able to so far."

He placed his hand on her thin knee consolingly:

"We have worn and sold everything to the last shred. Our only hope now is the healing air. With sun, air and water our health will never falter," said Podnebesko, quoting the Young Pioneers' song.

She shook her golden, gossamer hair.

"Never mind! We'll pull through!"

"Have you a profession?"

They laughed and glanced at each other.

"How can we have a profession. We went to the front straight from school. I as a sapper. She as a nurse. We are thinking of taking a correspondence course, but we haven't a kopek."

"Why don't you apply for your discharge since you are unfit for military service?"

"What about the rations and the other things?..."

"Suppose a suitable job turns up tomorrow?"

"Then I'll apply for my discharge tomorrow."

"In that case, sit down and write a brief account of yourself. And you too," nodding towards Natalya. "You have no writing paper? What am I to do with you? Go to the kolkhoz office and write it there... Nothing to go in?"

He got up with a gesture of disgust.

"What a duffer that Korytov is! He knows no more about people than a corpse."

"Are there any more here like you?"

"About five."

"Let them look me up. My name is Voropayev. And expect a messenger from me today."

From the Podnebeskos back to the Ogarnovs, to her, really.

She was still bareheaded and had not yet tidied herself.

"Have you a spare skirt to lend?"

She screwed up her eyes and laughed:

"You'd better take Victor's breeches; you'll catch cold not being used to skirts! What are you up to now? A fancy-dress ball?"

He hurriedly told her that it was not for himself that he needed the skirt.

She would not believe him at first.

"Giddy things, I suppose, and you are going to hand out clothes to them!"

With difficulty he persuaded her to go and see the people herself. She opened a clothes basket, took out a skirt and blouse and spreading them out in front of her she asked sarcastically, licking her lips with the point of her tongue:

"Will these fit? Didn't you take her measurements?"

And on leaving the house she turned round and said disgruntledly:

"I'll see what she's like. If she doesn't suit me, I'll not bring her at all."

And indeed—that evening she did not bring her.

* * *

The story about the Podnebesko couple is as plain as a worker-correspondent's newspaper article. They had lived somewhere near Byelaya Tserkov, had attended school, had left with the evacuees, while their old people had remained at home. He at once joined the army; she went to a nurses' training course.

They had served on different parts of the front and for a long time had heard nothing of each other.

Then it turned out that their old folks were not in Byelaya Tserkov, nor were their old homes, nor their belongings, which they had left with some friends who had gone to Kustanai—either because those friends had not returned or because they had been back so long that they had forgotten that the things had been left with them.

Then it turned out that both were wounded and sick and needed the southern climate. So carefree, like all military people, they went to the South. Here, after they had sold everything they had, including a trophy cigarette lighter, and after Yuri had even given up smoking, and they were eating only once a day, a thief broke into the house and stole their clothes, and on top of that Natasha felt that she was pregnant. Yuri Podnebesko had never felt so frightened as when he learned that. They had not enough money even to send a telegram if they had someone to send it to.

But miracles do happen. Voropayev came hobbling up, and a quarter of an hour later, scarcely believing it themselves, they realized that everything would be all right.

Next morning Yuri and Natalya Podnebesko were standing hand in hand at the desk in the kolkhoz office. She was barefooted, but wearing Ogarnova's skirt and blouse; he was wearing Ogarnov's parade breeches and carpet slippers and supporting himself with a walking stick made of a rusty bayonet fixed into the end of a stick of cornel wood.

Natalya offered to do the heaviest kind of work, fearing that if she asked for light work she would not be taken on. He did not ask for anything. He stood leaning over to the side of his shortened leg and with a painful smile said in an apologetic tone:

"I know it will be hard to find anything suitable, so never mind about me. . . . Help my Natalya. She is in such a condition now, you know what I mean. . . ."

Even suspicious and hardhearted Ogarnova could not stand this. She sobbed and brought her fist down on the desk with a bang, and that sounded like a decision.

Yuri was given the job of night watchman at the storehouse and Natalya was put into Pausov's vegetable brigade, which had nothing to do just now except prepare seeds, repair the hotbed frames and cart manure to them.

CHAPTER THREE

Voropayev had been away from town for over a week and Sophia Ivanovna, Lena's mother, was beginning to get worried about him. The thought that he had got himself fixed up in another place or that, God forbid, he had cooled towards the idea of taking the house, alarmed her awfully.

The more so that she had already taken certain measures on her own initiative, but on Voropayev's account, and she had long been impatient to get his advice. And all sorts of rumours were going around about the Colonel.

The five hundred rubles he had left her she had spent long ago on getting the roof repaired, but Markel, the roof mender from the kolkhoz, had exceeded the estimates and the repairs had cost nine hundred rubles, so she was now four hundred rubles in debt. The gardener, who had promised to plant five fig trees and several pomegranate bushes had let

her down and had done nothing so far, although she had bought manure—also on credit—and was now torn by the dilemma—to wait for the gardener or, to waste no time and dig up and manure the vegetable plot herself. The worst thing was that Voropayev's two rooms had not yet been plastered and the windows not glazed, and she was afraid that he would break the contract with her, although the house had been leased to them, on his power of attorney, for ten years.

Twice she had been to the Municipal Building Department to ask for alabaster, but she had been refused. It was necessary to talk to Korytov about it, but she did not like to go to him, and Lena absolutely refused to interfere in the matter of the house.

"It's your business and his, Mum," she said, shrugging her thin shoulders irritably. "What have I to do with it?"

"What do you mean? We are his partners. We have taken it half-and-half."

"You have taken it, Mum. I am your lodger."

"What do you mean? We have taken it together."

"Nothing of the kind. And besides, how can you prove that it's half-and-half. The lease is

in his name. He can put us out whenever he pleases."

"Put *us* out?"

"Yes, us."

"And who will look after his little boy? That was the arrangement we made: his house, my service."

"Arrangement! You'll see, he'll bring a wife here, and that will be the end of it."

"Leave off, Lenochka, you can't stuff me with that nonsense. He won't bring a wife so soon. Nobody will be in a hurry to marry a one-legged widower. And besides, the Colonel is not a bad man. He means what he says. He wouldn't deceive me."

"Where's the deception, Mum? There's no deception at all. He didn't pledge himself not to marry."

"You'd do better to find out what's become of him. Korytov must know. Left the house on my hands and flying around somewhere."

"But what's that to do with you? Since you are his partner, act and don't wait for him."

"Act, act," grumbled the old woman. "I have no money to act on my own. Can't you understand that?"

Still, she was unable to restrain herself. Promising to knit a woollen jacket for one of the kolkhoz women she took a deposit and, succeeding at last in inducing the gardener to come, she very reluctantly had him plant all the utterly useless things that might charm her Colonel—two bushes of climber roses, two bushes of pomegranate, five fig trees, two wistarias at the sides of the future veranda—at present indicated only by pegs—and three Alexandria Muscat vines in front of the veranda for an arbour.

She now slept no more than four hours a night and spent all her spare time in the yard, which she called an orchard, or a vegetable patch, or a garden, depending upon whom she was talking to. She laid a path from the house to the garden gates with broken bricks, and collected from the wrecked houses stones, sheet iron, white glazed tiles, stove oven doors and dampers, two dented but otherwise intact spittoons of the kind usually to be found in public parks, flowerpots and fragments of window glass which, with amazing patience, she stuck together to make panes for the hotbeds. Her biggest find was a pup, which for the time being she kept in her room, but for which she had already pegged

out a kennel near where the gates were to be.

She had actually found the gates. Blown off their hinges by a blast from a bomb, they were lying in an abandoned orchard, crushing the vines, and had she been able to hire a horse and cart, or a truck, she would long ago have carted them to the house. Now she was afraid that somebody else would take them, and to prevent that she had attached with wire a wooden tag to each half gate and had written on it with indelible pencil: "The gates of Colonel Voropayev."

But it seemed to her that this was not enough, so she borrowed a pot of white paint from the kolkhoz and with the skill of an experienced house painter, printed in bold script on the green iron bottom border of the gates: "The gates of Voropayev." Then she went to the Village Soviet and to the kolkhoz office and declared that the gates were—hers. Finally, happening to meet Korytov in the street, she told him that she had found Voropayev's gates and was afraid that somebody would steal them while the Colonel was running around, goodness knows where.

Korytov mumbled something in surprise, burst out laughing and said: "Yes, he's a rest-

less devil," and promised to keep the gates in mind.

"Don't worry about those gates, Sophia Ivanovna, but I warn you—if you steal electricity you'll get into trouble."

Those words pierced her heart like darts. She had entirely forgotten about electricity! For five whole days she searched for poles in the gardens of still vacant houses, found some, dug them up together with the remains of torn wire, dragged them with the help of Lenochka and two neighbours to her house and dug holes for them, but she was unable to put them up herself. She kept crossing herself in prayer that she might not be had up for stealing until an idea struck her—to cover the poles up with earth to hide them from envious eyes.

Even Lenochka had pity on her.

"If you have Voropayev's official power of attorney, why don't you go to the bank?" she remarked one day with a smile on her pale, sagacious lips.

"What will I do there?"

"They give subsidies to those who are building for themselves."

"Well, isn't that partner of mine a dunderhead!" exclaimed the old woman. "He didn't

leave me anything, the one-legged devil.... Who told you that, Lenochka?"

"There was a conference at Gennadi Ivanovich's and I heard it," her daughter briefly explained. "And they talked about Voropayev."

"Is that so?... What did they say?"

"What could they say? ... They mentioned some gates or other and were angry with him.... Now, when anything happens they say: 'That's like Voropayev's gates, brother!'"

"Gates!" gasped the old woman, feeling a cold shiver run down her back. "That's bad..." and she imperceptibly crossed herself. "What are we going to do now? Where on earth will I find that devil?"

"Send a telegram," said Lenochka, yawning. "I'll go to bed early tonight, Mum, we have the Cherkassova movement tomorrow morning, at five...."

"What's this movement so early in the morning? The things they get up to, good Lord!..."

"It's a movement to get all the people to help to restore the town ... like a subbotnik ... only every morning at five ... two hours before work..." Lenochka explained to her mother while undressing.

"We can't get our own house set to rights, and here we have to go and restore other people's . . ." the old woman began to grumble, but seeing that nobody was listening to her she turned her thoughts to the telegram.

Next morning she sent a telegram to the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz urging Voropayev to come back at once to get a subsidy. For a long time she wondered how to sign the telegram. If she merely signed it "Zhurina" he might not remember who it was. She could not sign it "your partner," it didn't sound quite respectable.

Finally she decided that the best thing would be to sign it "your half-houseowner Zhurina."

"Any fool will guess who that is."

Voropayev would certainly have guessed, and no doubt would have done something to Sophia Ivanovna's satisfaction had he received her telegram.

* * *

After that memorable night on which Voropayev succeeded in rousing the people, he for the first time since his return from the front felt that elation, pleasure and confidence that make a man happy and prosperous. He

forgot everything—his son, his unsettled state and the necessity of reporting to Korytov on how things were going, and lived only in wild intoxication for that offensive which he had so unexpectedly initiated. He did not remember where he slept or what he ate, or whether he ate at all; his voice was hoarse and his eyes were sunken, but his head had not been so clear for a long time. He delivered speeches, wrote letters and talked about the situation at the front, and all this, somewhat confusing, tiring and intoxicating, was happiness, and he would have liked it to go on forever.

But at the end of the second week he stumbled when going down a steep hill and severely hurt his wounded leg and his chest.

Blood welled from his throat when he was picked up. Varvara Ogarnova took him immediately to the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz, to that very same Dr. Komkov whom he had given such a dressing down at the kolkhoz meeting.

He lay on two mattresses spread on a cart and listlessly gazed at the road. Ogarnova did not worry him with talk. She was sorry for him and was afraid that she would really burst into tears if she began to talk. In her imagination he was a terrific hero and an unhappy man and, moreover, since that famous

night on which this one-legged Colonel had stirred up their dull lives, she had been a little afraid of him.

Riding on the cart, she reflected that all good people were shortlived and unhappy, that Voropayev would no doubt die soon from neglect, because, as her Victor had said, "the Colonel won't keep on his feet long at this rate."

Voropayev lay aimlessly staring in front of him trying not to think of anything. It had pleased him very much that the entire kolkhoz had come out to see him off (his only regret was that it had reminded him somewhat of a funeral); and he was really pleased with what he had done and felt that he would not be forgotten there for a long time.

Here he recalled something... it was at the time when his "offensive" at the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz was at its height. One day he was walking through the woods and suddenly he saw the following scene. At some distance from him a lad, about ten years of age, was standing on a small platform he had rigged up with some planks. On the platform rail there was a broken cup serving as a drinking glass. The boy was delivering a "speech," and now and again taking a "sip" from the cup and shaking his fist in imitation of Voropayev.

The small pinewood that straggled down the hill to the road was bathed in sunlight and, as a result, every tree stood out as if in a spotlight.

The boy was in the shade and was distinctly visible from the road. He was playing alone, far from any habitation.

What was he talking about, whom was he defending, or accusing? What was his little heart feeling as he banged his little fist on the platform rail and flung his arm forward like the bronze statue of Lenin?

Voropayev had felt an urge to go up to the boy and question him, but the thought of his own boyhood, when grownups had only spoilt his games, had restrained him. For all that, he looked back several times; that boy orator was of his spiritual creation; he watched him for a long time from a distance.

The sunbeams flowed in streams. Winding between the trees, they ran down the slope and in the open glade at the edge of the road they merged and formed a golden lake of light, but the boy could no longer be seen.

From this boy, Voropayev's thoughts turned to his own little son. He visualized Seryozhka under a pine tree in Serebryani Bor, play-

ing alone as a public speaker, like that little Cossack boy.

And so soon as the picture of Seryozhka's thin, puny little body, his pale face, tiny nose, shy smile and attentive, seemingly expectant, mournful but kindly eyes rose before him, he felt very sad. How good it would be if he were able to press Seryozhka's shock-haired head to his breast and sink into blissful sleep! But how could he do that when he had no corner of his own, no place in life, when he was separated from his son—for a long time perhaps—by circumstances over which for the time being he had no control? The family with whom Seryozha was at present living was a splendid one. Actually they spoilt the boy, and this frightened Voropayev. The love of strangers the boy enjoyed, the comfort they provided for him, the toys and books that other people and not he bought for him, in fact, everything that entered Seryozhka's world in his absence, filled him with jealousy.

It seemed as though his son was being weaned from him, and this scared him, like an impending disaster. When he was at the front he wrote Seryozhka nearly every week, but when in hospital he wrote less often, and lately, what with all the commissions and

inspections he had to go through, he had stopped writing altogether, except for brief telegrams. Seryozhka longed for the sea, and his father's neglect, or lack of time, must be grieving him. This little boy who had borne the hardships of evacuation, had suffered grief at the death of his mother, had lived through the horrors of air raids and constant anxiety about his father, had acquired, like a craving for fats and sugar, an all-absorbing love for the only one he had left in the world—his father. It was a tormenting, jealous, suspicious love, too hard for a child to bear.

"But what can I do? What can I do?" Voropayev kept on repeating to himself, conjuring up scenes of Seryozhka's life in Moscow and comparing it with the one looming vaguely before him here by the sea.

A family! How important that is in human life! "There must be heavy frost in Moscow now. They are probably freezing there."

It was only here, in the South, that the spring did not depart even in December, but seemed all the time to be making raids into the winter and even obstinately remaining in occupation for a day or two until it was roughly and noisily ejected by the wind like a rowdy, only to force its way in again a week

later, scatter snowdrops along the southern slopes, form buds on the cornels and dash out again into the mist, the rain and the early morning frost. Incidentally, even the rain here was pink, reddish, from the sun, and the clouds did not stay long in the sky. They were always being hurried somewhere, as if they were late and the wind was nervously whipping them up from sunrise to sunset.

Even when it was raining the sea retained its summer blue, and you had the impression that if you dipped your arm in it up to the elbow your shirt sleeve would be dyed. Some days it was so hot that it was difficult to breathe.

Bronzelike and curled, but not shed by the trees, the leaves in the oak thickets tinkled, the dark, shaggy cypresses and the spreading chestnuts rustled loudly, and the maples sadly and gently shook their yellow, thinned but not completely bald crowns.

In Hungary it was probably the same. But try as he would, Voropayev could not picture the Hungarian landscape, and he felt sorry for himself for having been put out of action so early and thus missing a great deal.

"Where are you taking me to, Varya?" he enquired, rising on his elbow.

Ogarnova was startled by his voice.

"Okh! Good Lord! I thought you were asleep," she exclaimed. "Where am I taking you to? To our doctor. . . ."

"Turn back! Turn back at once I tell you!"

"Now then, don't shout so loud. I am your superior now, and I'm not going to turn back."

"What the hell do I want your doctor for? Do you remember the drubbing I gave him at that meeting?"

"Yes, you are right, you are right," muttered Ogarnova. "What's to be done now? I tell you what. I'll take you to an old man I know, a splendid healer. Would you care to?"

"Yes, take me to the old man. I have to go to the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz just the same. I should have been there long ago. But tell me, who is this old man?"

"O-oh, he's a fine old man!" said Ogarnova solemnly. "Opanas Ivanovich Tsimbal, a settler from Kuban. He's something like you, gets to the bottom of everything. He keeps bees, runs a village laboratory and writes for the Moscow newspapers. . . . He knows everything, does that Cossack!"

"Tsimbal, Opanas Ivanovich? It can't be! Short, 'middlelike,' the Cherkesses used to say

about him. Is that him? Beard like a little tail?"

"That's right, that's right!" chuckled Ogarnova. "You know everybody in the world!... That's right, 'middlelike'.... Decorations right across his chest.... That's him, that's him! Well, shall I take you to him?"

"Yes, yes, do! D'you know, Ogarnova, he's like a father to me."

"You don't say! Then why didn't you go to him as soon as you arrived?"

"I had no idea he was here, not the slightest. What's he doing here? Why on earth did he come and settle in this place? D'you know, Ogarnova, he was a famous man in Kuban!"

"On active service together, or what?"

"Yes, of course. He's a fine old man. Real bighearted.... Well, well! I never expected to meet him here! I feel now as if I'm going home on leave, home, to this Tsimbal.... We were not together so very long, but we have become fast friends for life, to our very graves. D'you understand?"

She turned away with a sigh.

"Understand, understand! Why shouldn't I understand? Only you men can enjoy the privilege. As for us women, better for us not to remember what was good...."

She did not say anything definite, but Voropayev had a feeling that she might be referring to him.

"Sometimes you sit and think of the past and tears come to your eyes. Ask me, what was there between me and that man? Nothing. Sympathy, that's all. A dream," she said, keeping her back turned towards Voropayev and whipping up the horse.

The cart lurched forward and Voropayev was thrown on his back. He could not help feeling pleased that the conversation had ended. He was eager to get to Tsimbal, to what they had gone through together. The whole of his life during those two years of fighting in the Caucasus, in the forests on the Byelaya River, beyond Maikop, at Novorossiisk and amidst the ruins of Taman at once arose in his memory in a single scene.

This was in Kuban in the spring of 1942.

A wave of voluntary recruiting was sweeping across the countryside and Voropayev had been sent to one of these spontaneous Cossack meetings at which patriots, men and women joined the army in thousands.

The ground had been terribly muddy. If a child were to fall into this black-soil quagmire it would have been impossible to fish it

out. Guns, supplies and wounded remained stranded on the deserted dirt roads for weeks.

At dawn, on one of those accursed immobile days, Voropayev, on horseback, rode into a Cossack stanitsa where a certain Opanas Ivanovich Tsimbal, a local Michurin, had headed a "grandfathers' movement."

The stanitsa, nestling among the hills, was still in shadow and seemed to be asleep, but the hills around it were already tinged with gold by the low, almost horizontal sunbeams which were as yet only spreading on the ground and had not yet reached the roofs.

The streets, which were just quagmires, were deserted, but animated shouting and strains of music could be heard coming from the stanitsa market place.

In the open air, amidst loaded waggons, motor trucks, carts and saddled horses, there were crowds of Cossack women in holiday attire, their skirts tucked up high, children carrying red flags, and Cossacks in Cherkess cloaks, fully armed, and many with the old St. George's Cross on their breasts. The meeting was over. The people were saying good-bye. At one end of the market place somebody struck up a song; at the other, women were wailing. The sound of a Young Pioneers' trum-

pet drowned somebody's laughter. The awkward, childish beating of a drum was heard. Those who were leaving called to each other.

This was an old stanitsa, and it had a good past.

And old was this market place which had been trodden by many generations of Cossacks and still remembered the last of the Zaporozhtsi. Many tears had been shed here in the days of old. Once there were stationed here the Cossacks whom Potemkin had mustered for that hard campaign against the Turks on the Danube. It was from here that the stanitsa had sent the flower of its youth to join Suvorov in command of the Kuban Corps to fight the Nogais, and later to join Khrulev at Sevastopol, and Skobelev at Plevna. Later still, their grandsons had said good-bye here to their native homes and had hastened, at one time to Mukden, at another to join Brusilov in Galicia.

And here too they mustered to join Budyonny to defend the Soviets, or the Taman Army, which in an immortal, iron flood swept their native coast.

More than once had the place resounded with the majestic and mournful strains of the old "meditation" ballads, and more than once

had Cossacks bidden eternal farewell to their loved ones here, but always had mournful separation mingled with that restless Cossack élan, without which the Cossack finds life dull.

There was everything in abundance, one would think, but came the call from afar, and neither pleading nor persuasion could restrain them, it was good-bye to native land!

And so it was in this war. They danced and wept. They embraced and sang. They delivered speeches and performed feats of horsemanship, bespattering those around with thick greasy mud, but in all this there was a spirit of daredevil merriment.

Grey-bearded grandfathers, youths, girls, people wearing horn-rimmed eyeglasses and ordinary shoes, mounted their horses, and it was hard to tell at first who were going and who were seeing them off.

One of the first that had caught Voropayev's eye amidst this colourful crowd was a little, grey-haired Cossack with a neatly trimmed professor's beard and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, gracefully mounted on a horse. Next to him, also on horseback, was a round-shouldered girl, armed, in a Cherkess cloak, with thin plaits of hair peeping from under her black Kuban sheepskin hat.

This was Tsimbal and his granddaughter Xenia, who later became one of the best partisan scouts.

Voropayev joined them, and the troop moved off amidst the singing and shouting of the stanitsa. Just outside the stanitsa they were greeted with the deafening clang of hammers on anvils. About a dozen blacksmiths armed with hammers, big and small, were chiming an intricate carillon, the blacksmiths' farewell to departing warriors.

Tsimbal rode up to the blacksmiths at a stately pace and, as if he had never been a seed selector, but had commanded troops in battle all his life, he enquired with a marked touch of irony:

"Isn't the day long enough for your hammering?"

"Neither the day nor the night because of you, Ivanich. There's so much to do," came the answer, evidently prepared, from the senior blacksmith, a man with a black beard singed at the edge. Extracting from the furnace with his tongs a red-hot strip of steel, which from the curve could be guessed was a sabre, he held it up and asked:

"Is it good?"

Tsimbal clicked his tongue.

"If it's not an axle, it's a blade."

The blacksmiths laughed.

The senior blacksmith threw the strip into the fire and said in a tone of envy:

"You, Ivanich, wouldn't hesitate to take the sabres from the museum, of course, but we, begging your pardon, can't make six thousand sabres out of air."

"We'll not be able to hold Kuban with six thousand," answered Tsimbal significantly. "You, men, must make fifty thousand."

"By-the-by, permit me to have a look at yours," requested the blacksmith, and Tsimbal, with a leisurely but very precise and sweeping motion that seemed incompatible with his own small stature, unsheathed his blade.

The blacksmith wiped his hands on his leather apron and took the blade very carefully as if it were a thin slice of melon liable to break any minute.

"I told you so! It's a museum piece!" he exclaimed. "I can see that from the bluish steel. A real 'Horosan,' I suppose?"

"The devil knows, perhaps it is!" answered Tsimbal. "It was taken, my dear friend, from the museum that's called the city of Erzerum," --and gently taking the sword and returning it to its scabbard, he leaned far back in his

saddle and put spurs to his horse with such youthful ardour, with such grace in his imperceptibly swift, light and seemingly effortless movements, that it appeared as though he had not performed them one after another, but had sung them, like a song.

A month or six weeks later, this was already in the Crimea, when the German tanks were dashing across the steppe from Kerch and the Cossacks of the division in which Tsimbal was serving were hurled against them, Voropayev met Tsimbal again in sad and distressing circumstances.

The battle had just ended, and unsuccessfully. The retreat was about to begin. The wounded were being hastily placed into carts, the spare horses were being harnessed to the guns, and with frightful recklessness the men were deciding what part of the fighting equipment had to be abandoned. Voropayev, who had found himself in the midst of this Cossack flood quite by accident, suddenly heard a familiar voice somewhere near him, a voice which, in its eagerness and verve, was out of harmony with the situation.

"Good! Very good!" the voice was shouting. "That's Suprun! Look! He's captured two automatics! Brave lad! Nikifor, run to the Regi-

mental Commander! Hey, I don't mean you, I mean Nikifor!... What a handsome Cossack, the sonofabitch!... You! Why are you going empty-handed? Lift that crate onto your shoulder.... Hey! Wounded man!... What's the matter, are you dumbstruck? ... Speak up louder.... What do you want?... Ambulance men!... This way, this way! What the hell do you mean, serve a meal? At a time like this? Boil up some skilly!... A horse has its timetable.... Look alive boys, look alive! Are we downhearted!..."

Voropayev looked out of his car and caught sight of Tsimbal at once, as if he had been expecting him. Amidst the crowd of dispirited Cossacks, many of whom were wounded, but many more of whom were carrying things and wondering where to put them, Tsimbal was the only one who knew what had to be done. He ordered a wounded man to get into an ambulance cart and a fit one to load grain sacks; he sent the horse-drawn waggons on ahead and the motor trucks to the rear; he allowed some of the things to be abandoned and ordered that others be taken without fail.

He was scarcely recognizable. His neat professor's beard was just a tangle of grey hair looking as if he had been sleeping on it; his

smart, black Kuban hat was mudstained and its scarlet crown had faded to yellow; his Cherkess cloak had been torn and not mended, but pinned up.

Xenia was with her grandfather. Voropayev beckoned to her to come to him.

"Oh, we've had a terrible misfortune, terrible!" she whispered, trembling and glancing round at her grandfather. "Grigori was killed, my father.... Blown to bits. We collected his body in handfuls."

"Today?"

"This morning. We are taking him with us. Where can we bury him, don't you know? Or is everything going to pass to the Germans? Where can we take him? Or must we throw him into the sea?... What a misfortune! For God's sake, don't you, at least, desert us!"

He mentioned a small state farm where the burial could be performed, and strongly advised that the troop retreat to that farm, promising to be there himself.

In the middle of the night, not long before dawn, he met Tsimbal. Three arrived on horseback—the old man, his granddaughter, and a young Cossack, a distant relative of theirs.

Voropayev was surprised not to see the body of the dead man, but at once guessed that Grigori's remains were rolled up in the cloak that was tied at the back of Opanas Ivanovich's saddle. The grave had already been prepared by Voropayev's orders.

Weeping silently, Xenia untied the bundle from the saddle—all that had remained of her father's body—and carrying it in her arms like a swaddled infant she stumbled towards the grave and laid the pack on the edge.

Another five men arrived. They enquired in low voices:

"Here?"

"Here," answered Tsimbal firmly.

The thud of horsehoofs now became continuous. The men began to stream in.

Suddenly the old man cried out in a high, sing-song voice:

"Permit me, Cossacks, to commit my beloved son to the earth. According to ancient tradition, where a Cossack falls, there a kurgan* rises up. God grant that we deserve the same glory. Cossacks! I feel that I am burying myself in this grave! Myself am I burying! . . . Indeed, it's the truth, I am burying myself.

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* A burial mound.—*Tr.*

"From now on I shall know no sleep, no rest, no rewards or punishment, neither wounds nor sickness, until the Germans have been driven from our steppes. Even if we have to build a barrier of kurgans across our steppes we will drive the Germans out. Well... the night is passing, day is not coming. Farewell Grigori.... Everything is right, but one thing is not right—that a father should survive his son.... Our obeisances to you Grigori Opanasovich Tsimbal, from your father, from your daughter Xenia Grigoryevna, and from the Cossacks, your comrades-in-arms. And, friend, we ask for your forgiveness."

Some of the Cossacks blew their noses; one burst into sobs like a woman.

Voropayev said, suppressing his emotion:

"He said kurgan. Then let's build one. A Cossack's glory shall never fade."

And when the bundle in the cloak was laid at the bottom of the grave and old Tsimbal had thrown the first handful of earth upon it, the remains of his son, the people approached the grave. And it was not only his own Cossacks who worked with their spades, but others too—infantrymen, motormen, and generally, people who had fled from the Germans, and

by the morning a low but well-shaped kurgan had arisen on the grave.

An old man who lived at the farm promised to plant flowers, or a bush on top of the mound and to cover its sides with turf.

They parted on that occasion, not expecting to meet again.

But Voropayev afterwards heard a great deal about Tsimbal, about how he had fought as a partisan, and about how Xenia had died like a heroine fighting to avenge her father.

Later, after the capture of Taman, Voropayev happened to be passing through Tsimbal's stanitsa and he enquired what had become of the old man.

"Opanas has left us," a wrinkled old Cossack woman told him with a disconsolate gesture. "He scattered the ashes of his house to the four winds of heaven and went away."

And she told him how the old man had wept over the gutted remains of his famous house, which academicians had visited, and which had been linked with the lives of thousands of Kuban winegrowers. Having lost all his relatives, Tsimbal had left his native stanitsa forever, and nobody could tell where he had gone.

* * *

The *Kalinin* Kolkhoz was situated on the southern slope of a hill that ran down to the sea. The dwellings were perched on the top of the hill; lower down ran the motley-coloured vine and tobacco patches, and the ravine below was overgrown with young bramble, cornel and briar bushes. In the clear evening air the people could be seen from a distance. Voropayev saw the stately figure of an old man wearing a cotton print gown girdled with a Caucasian belt. He guessed at once that this was Opanas Ivanovich. The old man was working with a spade with the grace of a born Caucasian.

"Call him," Voropayev requested.

"Why should I? We have arrived already," answered Varvara reasonably, but seeing the sick man try to get up, she put two fingers into her mouth and emitted such a piercing whistle that Voropayev involuntarily winced.

The old man turned round. Voropayev waved his hand. The old man caught the gesture and staidly raised his Kuban hat.

"He has recognized me! Do you see, Ogarnova? He has recognized me!"

"Who can tell," she answered coldly. "He's standing there rolling a cigarette, but gives no other sign. . . ."

"But didn't you see him wave his hand?"

"Well, perhaps he did," said Ogarnova with a sigh. "But what does that show? Do you mean to tell me you love everybody who waves his hand to you? I wish I had known. I would have...."

"What would you have done?"

"I'd have done something.... What's the use of talking now. I suppose you'll kiss when you meet? That will be an interesting sight."

She seemed to have bewitched them. When the cart stopped, little, well-built Opanas Ivanovich quickly stepped up to Voropayev and the latter got up on his knees—they did not kiss, they did not even embrace, they merely gazed into each others eyes for a long time in silence, emitting a cough now and again.

* * *

"Yes, yes, I have heard about your heroic deeds," said Opanas Ivanovich in a kindly voice at last, screwing up his eyes as old men do. "They say that you lead kolkhozes into battle like battalions, is that right? Take care brother, you'll get into trouble.... This is not war...."

"Yes, you see what I've come to, Opanas Ivanovich, I'm off the reel."

"Oh, that's a minor thing. That can be mended. You know, I have taken up my herbs again," said Opanas Ivanovich, casually, as it were, gently helping Voropayev to get off the cart and, putting his arm round him, he led him to his house.

Ogarnova followed them carrying the knapsack and a basket.

"These are eggs from the kolkhoz," she said sternly. "Ar-ay-dee. Reinforced additional diet."

She was referring to the contents of the basket—eight eggs and a bag containing a couple of kilograms of flour.

"What's this ar-ay-dee? I don't want to hear anything about it. I can feed my guests without state subsidies. Take your eggs back! Take them back at once!"

"What are you shouting for? Comrade the Colonel met with his accident at our place and it's our duty to take care of him."

"Take them away or else I'll crush them right in front of your eyes, do you hear?" and Tsimbal raised his foot so threateningly that Ogarnova snatched the basket away in fright.

During the old man's altercation with Varvara, Voropayev stood admiring his picturesque figure, which nothing had changed in the least since he had seen him last. His grey unruly hair still peeped pugnaciously from under his black Kuban hat with its red crown and gave his clean-shaven face a boyishly impudent expression. True the wrinkles lent it gravity, but it was ready at any moment to break into a smile, which could not be restrained even by the stern, steel-rimmed spectacles with the rusty earpieces, the ends of which were bound with thick layers of cotton thread.

"I didn't expect to find you here, Opanas Ivanovich. Have you been here long?"

"I came here straight from the army. I was the first to emerge on the Kerch coast. I brought Grigori the first greetings from Kuban. Perhaps you remember? I pledged my word I would go and live where his kurgan is, but fate willed otherwise.... I couldn't find that kurgan, and the place had changed as a man never changes. Everything there is simply ploughed up, you can't find anything. So I decided to come here, to be in the neighbourhood."

Standing in the middle of the room they at once began to discuss serious business.

"Tell me, Opanas Ivanovich, what's going on? Everybody is rushing off to settle somewhere else. What's the matter?"

"Now you tell me, could you restart life in the place where your wife or children had perished? I doubt it, eh? Everything would have reminded you of the past. Think, would that be easy to bear? Look at the wealth we created in the course of those twenty years! All reduced to ashes. You would be weeping more than working."

"So people are going to new places to forget the old and to be able to work better, is that it?"

"Exactly."

"But did you hear what happened at the *Pervomaisky*. They are new people, but they didn't do a damn thing."

"Wait and see."

While engaged in conversation, the old man quickly and deftly laid the table, placed on the oilcloth cover two bottles of cordials made according to his own recipe, cleaned a lean, smoked carp still left from the stock he had brought from Kuban, and put the kettle on the table. Again Voropayev could not help admiring the freedom of the movements of his arms and body. For all that, the old man was

no longer what he had been. His body was holding out, but it was evident that he was tired in spirit.

Ogarnova sat demurely with her hands gripped between her knees.

"You are like an attorney," she said suddenly in a displeased tone. "That's why you are so thin and ailing. You are too inquisitive."

She turned her slightly squinting, mischievous eyes on Voropayev.

"Why do you keep on questioning old people? You might interest yourself in young ones too.... Take me, for example. I could fill up a questionnaire. Do you want to know why I came to the Crimea?" she asked in a bitter, challenging tone. "Because of my husband, because of Victor. He's an ailing man, he's got the ague, as you know, and the doctors kept dinning into my ears: 'Climate, climate, the man needs a complete change.' Just at that time an agent came along. 'There's no winter there,' he says, 'a perfect paradise, two crops of figs a year.' I threw everything up, sold all I had for a mere song, and came here.... That's my questionnaire. And Kapitsa, over at our place. Why did he come here? This is why Kapitsa came: all his sons were killed and he didn't want to stay in the old

home. And Gurov? Gurov lives alone and has always been a stay-at-home, so he said: 'I've never been anywhere since I was born. This will be a sort of tour for me.' As for Rybakov, he's a cobbler, he can get on anywhere. Do you understand?"

Carried away by her own story, Ogarnova spoke rapidly, with fervour and a touch of anger, and the motives that had prompted people to leave their native homes and go to unknown parts at once became clearer to Voropayev. Of course, the war had stirred up everybody. The front was not only on the Danube. It was in the gutted stanitsas, in the ruins of domestic bliss, in the quest for happiness, which at the present time was needed more urgently than bread.

Somebody outside groped for the door and Dr. Komkov cautiously stepped into the room.

He glanced at Ogarnova, but to everybody's surprise she stopped talking. A moment later she hurriedly took her leave and went out. Her angry cry rousing her dozing horse came when she was already outside the gate.

Komkov was tall, well-built and had a smile all over his face even when he was silent, as if he knew something that was funny but kept it to himself.

"I am the doctor that you trounced at the kolkhoz meeting," he said. "My name is Komkov. Let's get acquainted."

Voropayev reluctantly proffered his hand, saying:

"If I had come across a defender of mankind like you at the front, I'd have had him shot without more ado, and would never repent it."

"And if I had you on my operating table, my dear Colonel, I'd begin to cut you up in two ticks without asking what your name is. Do you want to hear my explanation, or do you take it for granted that I am guilty without hearing my side of the case?"

"I don't need your explanations."

"Thank God for that. Frankly, I thought you would want to open a debate."

Failing to notice Voropayev's rising ire Komkov drew several slips of paper from his pocket and continued:

"I will give you a medical certificate and I'll ask you to speak about me again at the next meeting. It will be very appropriate."

Voropayev waved the proffered certificate aside.

"Am I to understand that you are going to treat me?"

"I see that you are observant. Yes, I am going to treat you. I will not conceal it."

Komkov spoke with such dignity and confidence that Voropayev looked at him inquisitively. He liked people who were firm and confident.

The young doctor behaved like a man who knew something very important that other people could not understand, and there was a youthfully boastful air about him that rather suited him.

"I fully appreciate the fact, comrade patient, that you have been used to being treated by celebrities in the capital and I have no illusions on that score," he went on, smiling first with his whole face, then only with his eyes and finally only with the corners of his mouth. "A man who has received treatment in the capital, even from a third-rate practitioner, thinks he can find only horse doctors in the provinces. You will have to abandon that opinion. At the present time the illness you are suffering from is regarded as being neither romantic nor complicated. It is a simple one. Any physician with the least bit of training can treat it. It needs a simple medicine—air. As much as you can get of it—awake and asleep. You must air yourself through and

through, bathe every cell of your body in fresh air. You must breathe, move, eat in the open air, do you understand? And sleep in the open air—that without fail. In damp weather, overcome the dampness by activity. You must not lie down. If you cannot get out of bed, do gymnastics in bed. And finally, keep occupied. Tuberculosis is combated by occupation. No reverie-ing, that's enervating; you must keep yourself occupied. Lastly, discipline. Do what your illness does not want you to do. When you feel you want to loll in bed, do the opposite. When you want to cough, restrain yourself. When you feel giddy, exercise your will power. Turn your illness head downwards. The most effective treatment for tuberculosis —a treatment that has never failed either doctor or patient—is will power. Tuberculosis is a test disease, bear that in mind."

"Does it not seem to you that all your advice smacks somewhat of the textbook for first-year students?" enquired Voropayev, now almost in a merry mood.

"Perhaps. Great truths are primitive," answered Komkov coolly. "When Pirogov introduced the sorting of wounded and the formation of convalescent companies, people said he was taking the bread out of the mouths

of quacks. Vishnevsky, who invented that wonderful salve and taught the blockade method, was called a feldsher. It is better to be a feldsher with the elements of genius than a genius with the outlook of a horse doctor."

"Fine! Well said!"

But the young doctor, stroking his thick, fair, unruly hair, pretended he had not heard this praise.

Voropayev was now eager to be treated by this young doctor who had not yet been afflicted by a single doubt concerning his profession. Komkov behaved in a masterful manner, and this must affect his patients.

"And so, begin to take air in the most unlimited doses. Learn to breathe. Get into the habit of regarding air as food, chew it with your pharynx, get its taste and smell, enjoy it like a gourmand, don't be indifferent towards it. Learn to prepare this food to your taste. You have a tremendous variety to choose from. Drink only flowing air. The air kept in a closed room for two hours is poison for you. In relation to your disease you must pursue the open-door policy."

Komkov got up, bowed and went out without offering to shake hands. Tsimbal, making

no attempt to detain him, saw him across the yard to the gate, came back and scratching his grey head said ruefully:

"My operation was not a complete success. I asked him to come here because I wanted you to be friends. That man has a splendid mind! And he's energetic! He could handle typhoid or cholera as easily as you and I can drink vodka. We here call him People's Commissar, no less. And yet you sort of want to pull his ears!"

"Are you too on his side?" enquired Voropayev, regretting now the rude way he had met this nice fellow Komkov, who, probably, was very ambitious, like all young specialists, and, of course, having some very new little theory of his own, was no doubt interesting, like everything young.

"How can I be otherwise? He was a partisan! Performs miracles with people! They come to him from a hundred versts around! He escaped from the Gestapo and lived in a cellar in Sevastopol for three months. And what a healer he is! He'll have you well in two ticks."

"But he's so young," said Voropayev, only for the sake of saying something. He felt ashamed.

Komkov's inspired face, made eloquent by the rich play of smiles, stood like a living reproach before his eyes. Had he been strong enough to get up and run after him, he, of course, would have done so, but he was very reluctant to yield to Tsimbal.

"He's got a swelled head," he asserted.

Opanas Ivanovich grasped the back of the bed on which Voropayev was reclining and pushed it through the door into the yard.

"Even if you freeze, I'll not allow you into the house until Komkov orders me to do so!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Voropayev was amazed at the confusion of contradictions that prevailed in the rear, and the constant strain he put himself to in the endeavour to grasp as quickly as possible all the new phenomena that poured into his bewildered mind left him physically tired, although he rested for whole days.

If there was no rain or fog, his bed was moved into the yard in front of the house.

To the west Chumandrin's sovkhoz could be seen with its houses below the highway, all facing south. At sunset, the windows gleamed with dazzling, golden brightness.

Nearer, at the mouth of the gorge, were huddled the cottages of the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz. In the daytime, scanning them through field glasses, one could even guess the mood of the people working in the vineyards; and from the "buffet" on the outskirts, the

echoes of song and the vague strains of an accordion could be heard.

To the east could be seen the tobacco plantations of the *Mikoyan* Kolkhoz, the garden of the children's sanatorium, and the road-minder's cottage. From the woods, above the highway, smoke often rose—from the stove being lit in the lumber camp. Still higher up, somewhere on the crest of the mountains, there stood, one guessed, the solitary cottage of the meteorological station, where the meteorologist, Zarubin, lived in complete solitude.

In the old park that ran between the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz and the seashore, the small buildings of sanatoria had stood before the war. The buildings were now in ruins, the park was neglected, had run wild, and looked like a forest.

The *Kalinin* Kolkhoz was shut out from Voropayev's view by the walls of Tsimbal's yard and he could guess its situation only from the voices that reached him from there. Over the kolkhoz, and over the stretch of seashore that came within his field of vision, towered Eagle Peak. Its reddish-grey slopes, as steep as a wall, remotely resembled an ancient castle.

The gnarled, crooked branches of the tamarisks, motionless even in a strong wind, looked petrified.

Over the peak, leaping and prancing as if tumbling in the lighter air, festive clouds were continuously racing, looking dry, like smoke.

In the light-blue haze in the distance, where the last visible mountain merged with the mist, it seemed as though semi-gloom prevailed all day, or that rain was about to fall; but this was only the cunning play of perspective.

Hitherto, Voropayev had never been alone with nature for long, and at first it embarrassed him, as if he were in the presence of a woman with whom he was little acquainted, and with whom he was obliged to spend whole days.

But soon he grew accustomed to his new situation and it interested him.

He lay like an object possessed of sight, hearing and memory and, as it were, became part of the surrounding nature.

The birds were the first to cease to be afraid of the quiet human who could whistle so beautifully. Bread crumbs and scraps of apple lay scattered near his bed.

There were all kinds of birds here, native and migrant. Some appeared that Voropayev recognized as war victims: some of them limped, others suffered from nervous twitches,

and still others were obviously deaf and, as a consequence, were unnaturally indifferent to danger.

These birds, driven from their native habitations by the war, and having flown here in obvious alarm, were refugees. Their endeavour to unite with the local feathered tribe, even of different breeds, seemed so human that it amazed Voropayev.

The local poultry were clearly embarrassed when a tiny robin crept into their family. It pecked at their food and dodged the rooster so defiantly that it was a pleasure to see. But one night, when the moon, enveloped by a thin cloud, gleamed like an ember in the ashes, Voropayev heard the robin twitter loudly, as if talking to itself, and flying backward and forward over the house and yard. At night it wanted to be itself.

One morning he saw a mockingbird running across the yard, bowing as it ran and then dancing wildly on a smooth stone before taking flight. In his solitude, Voropayev would have done the same had he been able to fly.

This mockingbird soon got used to Voropayev and did not hesitate to snatch bread crumbs almost from his hand. One day, perch-

ing on the edge of the roof and shuddering as if it had been stung under its wings, it suddenly began to sing, glancing sideways at Voropayev as if to see whether he liked it. First it sang like a nightingale, then like a lark, and after that in imitation of a quail, all the time glancing at the man-bed, as if wishing to hear what he would say. It behaved like a person familiar with several languages who wanted to converse with a silent fellow traveller.

"Perhaps it is not merely singing, but composing," was the thought that flashed through Voropayev's mind, and for a moment he tried to test the correctness of his conjecture, but he laughed and reflected: "What wild ideas enter your head when you are alone!"

But the same idea occurred to him again when he saw a starling sitting on a bough zealously imitating the mewing of a kitten; and it occurred to him a third time when two larks, making a wide spiral in the air, carried their song so high into the sky that Voropayev almost choked, trying to catch the faint trilling that was diffused in the blue, sung, as it were, in first and second, the one harmonizing with the other.

But the presence of the birds failed to soothe him, it only still further accentuated his

loneliness. One day he rummaged in his field satchel and with his waxen-coloured trembling hands unfolded his notes on *The Moral Element in War*, the book to which at one time he had attached so much importance.

His reflections during the early days of the war were strangely similar to those that troubled him now.

"Strictly speaking," he had written near Yelnya in the summer of 1941, "there is no such thing as physical suffering. Suffering always contains an element of the mind, and therefore, the more organized the mind, the more removable is pain."

In the autumn of the same year, in Novgorod, a severely-wounded engineer had said to Voropayev, then a Battalion Commissar:

"At all events, Comrade Commissar, remember Seneca's excellent precept: 'A man is unhappy only to the degree that he thinks he is so.' "

Voropayev had then enquired:

"So in your opinion, courage, too, is 'only to that degree'?"

"Of course!" the engineer had answered. "There are no born cowards or born heroes. Every man becomes what it is easiest for him to become."

In the winter of the same year, in conversation with Voropayev, Lev Mikhailovich Dovator said approximately the same thing:

"Cowardice is easily cured. The coward must be convinced that he is a brave man. Once he has been convinced of this, trust him without fear. Courage is consciousness of responsibility carried to the extreme."

A year later, in an underground hospital in Kerch, Surgeon Lunkevich, who had just been wounded by a bomb splinter, said to Voropayev, who had been prepared for an operation connected with a severe wound in the chest:

"Listen, Commissar, pain can be easily borne if you don't allow the thought of it to exaggerate it. Cheer yourself up. Say to yourself: 'It's nothing, it will pass off soon,' and you will see how quickly the pain will cease. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I understand, Doctor," Voropayev had answered. "I am not complaining. I am only afraid that *you* will operate on me. You have just been wounded yourself, and you may not have the strength to go through with it."

The surgeon answered:

"But I have no fears about you, although your wound is very grave. I am not afraid that you will not have the strength to bear the

operation and may die under the knife. I know you will bear it. And I too will bear it. We shall both pull through all right."

There was a note like the following: "It is said that Lagrange has observed that the wounds of victors heal faster than those of the vanquished."

But why quote Lagrange? His own experience proved that. When Voropayev entered Bucharest, the wound he had received at Kishinev had not yet healed.

Even now, as he recalled this, he felt a nervous tingle all over his body, the blood throbbed in his temples and he felt an accretion of vital strength.

How long, long ago that was, almost in his youth, and yet, how little time had passed since then!

At that time he was still an active, joyful biped.

It had been a bright day, but rather windy and lots of dust was blown around. He had charged into the city on a tank with the scouts and later remained there alone. His face, smudged from the innumerable kisses he had received from the Rumanian women, must have looked very comical and frivolous. Strictly speaking, he should have gone into hospital,

but was it possible to lie in bed on the day of our entry into the dazzling-white, madly-excited city? He did not sit down until late at night, roaming through the streets, entering into conversation, explaining things or else mutely embracing people, and the Kishinev wound healed as if it had been anointed with some magic salve. And the next wound, a much lighter one received after Bucharest, refused to heal for an inexplicably long time, almost until he reached Sofia.

But when, leaning on his stick, he alighted from the staff motorbus in the public square in the centre of the Bulgarian capital and, not waiting to be embraced, began to embrace and kiss everybody who ran into his arms, something seemed to pinch the wound and it ceased to hurt. He could barely keep on his feet, his head swam and his finger tips were numb, so tired had he become in the course of the day, for he had spoken for hours in the square, in soldiers' barracks and even from the pulpit of a church into which he had been carried shoulder-high. Standing by the side of the priest, he had spoken about Stalin, about Russia, and about the Slavs, as if he were no less than a thousand years old and had more than once nailed his shield to the gates of Tsargrad.

And with every new cry: *Zhivio!* the wound seemed to close tighter, and three days later only a narrow scar remained. Yes, such days occur once or twice in a century, perhaps; such days possess miraculous healing powers, and happy is he whom fate rewards with such days....

Such happiness does not repeat itself, and it had seemed to him that there would be no more great events in his short life. But there were! And one must be able to dispose of them properly, for a man cannot take with him into his grave so much that is extraordinary and beautiful instead of passing it on to be enjoyed by the living.

More and more often the thought of an early death occurred to him and he was saddened by the consciousness that just now, when the war was soon to draw to a close and a wonderful life was about to begin, he, Voropayev, even if he lived to see those days, would be only half alive and would not be able to build that postwar life in the front ranks of the builders as he had helped to build the prewar life.

He had helped to build that prewar life and in his heart had been proud of it; but in the building of this one, which will be even

grander and freer, he will not, perhaps, be able to participate. How much had been planned! How much had been started! The devil take this life! It always seemed as though mountains and forests of unbroken days still lay ahead, but the forest had turned out to be extremely thin and the mountains very low.

Not his wounds, not his diseased lung, but the consciousness of his uselessness tormented him. He was not striding, he was lolling through life. He thought of many things. He regretted many things. Nothing could give him hope.

Komkov was called again. The treatment was regarded as a job of work in which physician and patient participated on an equal footing.

"So you are finding solitude tiresome?" he enquired in a condescending tone after hearing all the complaints, all the entreaties, all the fears and imaginary forebodings of his restless patient. "Then don't wallow in your own misery. Occupy yourself with other people."

* * *

Next day two girls were sitting at Voropayev's bedside, Svetlana Chirikova and Anya Stupina, who had returned from captivity in

Germany only a month ago. They intended to go to the Far East and had come for advice.

Both had been born and brought up here, at the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz, they had been Young Communist Leaguers, shock brigaders and more than once the local newspaper had written about them. Narrow-shouldered, dark-haired, with a dull-white, malarial face, Stupina, before the war, had been the leader of the local Y.C.L., had taken part in amateur theatricals, had been regarded as the best sniper in the kolkhoz and had twice jumped from a parachute in the regional capital and had established a record of some kind.

She was of Cossack blood, and although she still looked a girl in spite of her nineteen years, her features were those borne by Cossack women without change from childhood to old age.

The great-great-granddaughters of the wives of the Zaporozhtsi warriors, these Cossack women have acquired in the Caucasus the darker eyes and hair and the graceful carriage of highlanders. The Cossack woman never thinks of her poise or gait; both are formed freely and naturally, without her knowing it as it were. But what wonderful grace, what charm-

ing artlessness there is in every one of her simplest movements not even intended for others' eyes!

This charm and beauty was exceptionally marked in Stupina. Rather short, angular and with an ordinary face that one would not particularly remember, it was the harmony and gracefulness of her figure that made her attractive.

In contrast to her, Svetlana Chirikova was a fine, strapping girl, with thick, fair plaits wound gracefully round her large head, and with a rougish look in her large grey eyes.

Voropayev asked them to tell him what had happened to them.

"I'm not inquisitive, you understand that yourselves. But tell me everything. Conceal nothing."

"The most important?" enquired Stupina for some reason, and Voropayev saw Svetlana grip her shoulder and dig her big, white fingers and small, narrow fingernails into it.

"To be quite honest," began Anya, "this is what happened: I went to Germany voluntarily, you might say. But what else could I do?" she almost shrieked, as if expecting a rebuke, even if a silent one. "The girls in my Y.C.L. organization were conscripted for Germany: Sonya

Shutova, Larissa Pronina, Svetlana Chirikova, Nadya Protsenko, all of them, all of them. I am not talking about the boys. I was only thinking about my girls at that time. Our boys fled—some into the woods, some to the partisans. It was easier for them. So all my Y.C.L. organization was going away. What was I to do? Remain here? So I went up and volunteered to go with them. Why did I do that? I'll tell you. What was I thinking? I was thinking that a revolution would certainly start in Germany and we would be very useful there. Nothing like that happened, but how many of us labour conscripts became partisans? Anybody will tell you that. I myself nearly got to the Czechs. . . ."

Stupina's story was indeed full of surprises. She expected to go to the same place her friends were taken to, but she was disappointed. They were separated while still on the way, and Anya was placed in a camp connected with a factory, manned chiefly by Frenchmen. She organized the escape of twenty Czechs and found herself, first in the Gestapo and then back in the same camp, but in a much worse position. After they were liberated, Stupina was sent home *via* Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. She saw with her own eyes what

was going on in Europe and could now form a judgment on many things on the basis of her own experience.

Never had masses of people made such long and instructive journeys as they made during this war. Millions of people—French, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Uzbeks and Azerbaijanians—travelled all through Europe and saw fascism in all its hideous nakedness. They also had a look at the Allies, saw the changes in the systems of government, and could compare the fascist system with the new, transitional ones; and they arrived home with a tremendous fund of political observations which they could never have accumulated in any peacetime school.

But Anya had returned with her head sunk in shame. The impulse that had prompted her to volunteer to go to Germany did not seem as romantic to her now as it had done three years ago when she had naively anticipated taking part in a revolution in Germany; but she became acutely conscious of the blunder she had committed only when she was in Rumania, at some stage in her journey home, among people who had acted as village elders and burgomasters for the Germans and were buying Rumanian passports in order to hide

their identity; among traitresses who had been the mistresses of Germans, and among captives and martyrs. At that time people with clear consciences were still intermingled with barefaced scoundrels.

Here Stupina realized that in the eyes of her countrymen she was only a little different from Soprunova from Stavropol, who had kept a brothel for German officers.

Her second life during the war began almost on the threshold of her home. The Y.C.L. organizer reawakened in her and, taught by her camp experience, she discerned the burgomasters and policemen by signs which infuriated this scum who were now claiming to be martyrs.

But on the railway station in Kharkov she unexpectedly came across a group of women from her camp who had left their native land in the capacity of German "frauen." On catching sight of her these women shouted: "Hey, chocolate girl, come into our company!" and the station echoed with the laughter of a hundred voices when, bursting into tears, she ran away as if she had indeed belonged to their company.

Even now she shuddered as she related how ashamed and frightened she had been

and said that she would long be frightened of her past.

"I want to go away," she said on finishing her story.

"Of course, you haven't deserved any decorations for the little fight you waged. A girl like you could have done much more, but you have no reason to be afraid of your past," said Voropayev, and taking her hand in his and patting it, he looked so closely into her eyes that she jerked her head back in fright.

* * *

Svetlana Chirikova's story was simpler and sadder. When she was conscripted for work in Germany, she had not the courage to disobey the German order and was sent to work at a shell factory. Captivity at once broke her spirit and killed her desire for activity. It seemed to her that there must be some truth in the stories the Germans broadcast about victories gained over the Red Army; these stories filled her with horror and pain, but she could not find the strength to discount them. Later, the world in which she had grown up began to seem like something far away and lost. From now on a semi-animal existence was to be her

lot for the rest of her life. She succumbed to the idea. Shortly afterwards a German corporal chose her as his mistress and she obediently and resignedly submitted to this disgrace too. It was all the same to her, no other kind of life seemed possible. The corporal was transferred to another post and he passed Svetlana on to a friend of his, and here too she had raised no objection, made no attempt to resist, but accepted her new situation with the morbid indifference that had overcome her in captivity. At night she dreamed of Russia, of school, of her friends, of the jolly festivals at the kolkhoz, but all this seemed to belong to a former and now vanished life, and she did not even weep for the past, but only sighed as over a disappointed hope.

"If they were to write about the Germans what I know about them, by God, not one of them would be left alive," she said grimly, biting her lips.

Stupina pulled her sleeve.

"Don't, Lanka," she said reproachfully. "Don't torment yourself. What has been has been. It's no use talking about it."

Voropayev was still climbing the ladder of vague conjecture when Svetlana laughed bitterly and said:

"To cut a long story short, I was a gee-doubleyou. D'you know what that is? A German . . ." she hesitated a moment. . . . "A German wench, that's what I was. That's all."

"I should say that's all. You are not boasting about it, are you?"

Svetlana shook her head. There were tears in her eyes. A lump rose in her throat.

"You ought to scourge yourself not with confessions," Voropayev went on to say, but Stupina interrupted him in a voice that was at once amazingly gentle and firm:

"It's very hard for her, Alexei Veniaminich. . . . Look how they broke her life! . . . She doesn't know what she's saying. . . . And what is there to say? She's been dragged in the mire, and it will take her years to get clean."

"No, I said it, and I'll tell you why I said it . . ." with a gesture of despair, the sincerity of which could not be exceeded by the frankest repentance, Svetlana clasped her head in her hands and, swaying her body, forced herself to say: "The baby! What shall I do about the baby! How will I live? . . . Who will trust me? . . . I am lost, Alexei Veniaminich, and I have nobody to help me!"

Still clasping her head as if afraid that this poor troubled head would drop off if it were

not supported, she ran out of the yard and, sobbing loudly, hurried down to the vineyards.

Voropayev rose up on his elbow. Stupina said to calm him:

"There's a watchman's shack down among the Muscats. She's gone there. She'll have a good cry and it will pass off. But you must help her, Alexei Veniaminich. You should have seen what she was like before the war. Kind and loving. She was my best friend.... Perhaps we could send her away somewhere? When she gets her baby they'll make her life a misery. Who will stop to think about what she has gone through?"

Voropayev placed his hands upon her thin, angular shoulders:

"Are you her friend still?"

"None of my girl friends have come back. She's the only one. I am sorry for her. It will be the end of her."

"But what about yourself? Is everything in order with you?"

"With me?—everything," she answered with her lips alone, giving him a look of profound and frank devotion that left no room for doubt.

"All right, I'll think of something. Look in again in a couple of days' time."

"Very good, Comrade Colonel," and the thin little figure whisked past the low stone wall of Tsimbal s yard. The rustle of bushes and rattle of pebbles enabled Voropayev to guess that she was hastening to her friend's assistance.

"Yes, this is what an easy life brings you to," he reflected. He did not want to think about Chirikova any more. It was difficult to help people of that kind. But Anya Stupina had aroused his interest. She deserved a helping hand.

* * *

Without invitation, but very opportunely, ex-Sergeant Gorodtsov, of the *Mikoyan* Kolkhoz, called one day. He had been wounded in both legs in Hungary and had only recently been discharged from hospital. While he was away at the war his wife and his mother had migrated to this district, and so he had arrived here to "inspect the place of residence," and not yet knowing what work to take up, had decided to seek the advice of the "responsible neighbour."

As soon as Gorodtsov stepped into the yard and, soldierlike, sized the place up with a quick, keen glance, Voropayev, with that special intuition he had acquired during the

war, guessed at once that this was a sturdy, intelligent soldier and, in all probability, a firm-handed master. In his short, patched trench coat, flung wide open, and artificial lambskin cap with ear flaps, he limped up to Voropayev's bed, and guessing without enquiry that this was the man he needed, he introduced himself in military fashion.

"Just a neighbourly call," he began, rather remotely. "People are saying that we have a Colonel here, wounded, lots of decorations, been everywhere, so I thought to myself, that's just the kind of man we want, I'll go and look him up."

Gorodtsov was probably about forty years of age. He had a young, healthy, pleasant face adorned with a pointed, reddish moustache, and small eyes with a merry twinkle in them, screwed up as if he were gazing into the distance.

"A scout?"

"The god of war, Comrade Colonel. I was a gunlayer."

"Did you get far?"

"I had a look at Hungary," answered Gorodtsov, compressing his lips significantly. "That's where I was knocked out. Did you happen to be there?"

"No. Didn't manage it. My fighting days ended in Bulgaria."

"I was there too. They're a lively people. Not bad. I ate their kebapchi and shishi, smoked their tobacco and drank their wine. And it's quite easy to understand their language. They are a sensible lot too. But hot! My word! Up with their fists at the least word, it's God's truth. If you cross their path they'll out with a knife, but they'll get their way. A mettlesome lot, they are!"

They went on talking and to their mutual surprise learned that they had more than once fought in the same battles. They now understood each other at a mere hint. Without the least embarrassment, Gorodtsov drew a can of meat from one pocket and opened it with a huge curved knife; then, from the other, he drew a hunk of bread.

"Do me the favour, Comrade Colonel, and have a bite with me," he said, spreading the viands in front of Voropayev. Setting to himself, and chewing lustily, he continued speaking: "As soon as we'd take up a position and dig in, I'd go round and inspect the place to see what it's like and get myself accustomed to it. And as sure as eggs is eggs, if I didn't like a place I didn't feel I wanted to fight for

it! What do you say to that? Not that I didn't like it, that rarely happened, but in most cases I used to picture myself building a house in each of those places."

"And did you build many?" Voropayev enquired eagerly, rising on his elbow.

"About a dozen. One in Bryansk, another beyond Vilnius, right on the Viliya. You've been there? So you know what beautiful spots there are there. And I also built one on the Terek and on the Kuban. I built one on the lower Dnieper—a palace, I tell you! I kept to the rivers mostly. Sitting in those trenches your heart grows cold, and to while away the time you begin to picture to yourself how you would live here, how you would run things, and eventually you think something up. I'd get my gun crew so worked up on this that sometimes, as soon as we'd be up on the first morning, the gun commander would shout out: 'Terenti! Where are you going to put your house up? I want to know,' he says, 'so as not to blow it up accidentally.' On the Vistula I couldn't restrain myself, and I put up two country houses."

"What about Hungary?"

"No, didn't attract me. Neither among the Magyars nor the Rumanians. Think of it! I

can't explain it myself. And what places there are there, eh? The Danube alone. . . ."

Time passed imperceptibly and they talked on until evening.

Staidly glancing at his splendid wrist watch with the fashionable black dial and golden hands, Gorodtsov gasped politely and pretended to be shocked at having stayed so long.

Voropayev would not let him go. Terenti Gorodtsov appeared to him to be exactly one of those housebuilding cranks that he was himself, and he looked upon him as a snapshot of himself taken unawares.

"I've had occasion to be lectured by three Front Commanders, that's something to be proud of, no matter whom you tell," said Gorodtsov in a tone suggesting that he was indeed proud of his luck. "I got such a dressing down from the Commander of the Western Front, my God!" and he shook his head as if he had taken mustard. "He gave me a dose of vitamins, I can tell you! . . . And the Stalingrad one—he even dropped into poetry! You wouldn't believe it, but it's God's truth! Well! When he barked those four lines I thought my eyes would pop out of my head. He had the gift of the gab all right! Now, the Fourth Uk-

rainian, he was different. While he was trouncing you there was pity in his eyes, as if you were sending him to blazes and not he you. He bawled you out with pity in his voice; seemed awfully upset. And you stand in front of him like a sonofabitch and your tears are choking you. As if it were tearing at your heartstrings. But I've heard that Marshal Rokossovsky is the worst of the lot. He doesn't bawl you out, they say, oh no! He likes to crack jokes—and you don't know where to turn. Oh, he's a great wit. A smile on his lips, all painless, you know, but when he fires one of his cracks at you—you feel your guts are turning inside-out."

Bringing his face close up to Voropayev's he, in a mysterious whisper, as if the mockingbird that had taken up its quarters in the yard might overhear him, he related the most holy of his experiences.

"I saw Comrade Stalin—twice. The first time near Moscow when we put the Germans on the run. Near Klin, if I remember right. We heard that he had arrived. I was on the job of carting dead Germans away. We knew for sure that he had arrived; the news had come down the line and we could trust our grapevine radio, but we couldn't find out where

he would be. Of course, I had no idea that I would see him. Well now, listen to what happened.

"It was a moonlit night, I remember. You could see every bush two hundred metres away. Well, we were picking up those Germans. They were frozen so hard that they rang like clay pots, and you were almost afraid they'd break into pieces. As we were loading the trucks we saw four or five cars coming down the highroad. They stopped. One big chief gets out, then another. They didn't say a word to us but made a sign as much as to say: you get on with your job and we'll get on with ours. But one of them, I see, makes towards us. He was in a greatcoat, but I couldn't see his rank. He comes up to us as simple as you like and says: 'Good evening, Comrades!' Of course, we gave the regulation answer. Then he says: 'Not an interesting job, burying Germans, is it?' We had a blighter attached to us, the devil knows where he came from, but he had a tongue like a whiplash. He steps up and says: 'Why ain't it interesting? Better that we should bury them than they should bury us!' Blurted it out like that! The chief saw at once that he was a talkative chap and so he asked him: 'What do you

think? Did our army do all it could in this case?' And this bloke answers: 'Sure it did, and more!' Just then the moon lit up this chief's face and we recognized him at once—Stalin!

"The poor blighter was flabbergasted. But Comrade Stalin shook his head, as if he didn't agree with him. 'No,' he says. 'It is wrong to think that we have done more than we could. Let us put it more modestly: we did all that was in our power. Will the people understand that?'

"Here I spoke up, and where I got the pluck from, heaven only knows. I says: 'The people will understand, Comrade Stalin. They will, you can be sure of that.' And I couldn't say another word. I felt as though somebody had gripped me by the throat.

"He nodded, went off a little way and stopped, took his hat off and stood there a long time alone. On going back to his car he stopped near us again and asked another of our chaps: 'Are you glad we beat the Germans?'

"I don't know what this chap was, an Uzbek or Azerbaijanian, but he was a fiery one, and disgruntled, always finding fault. And he, like that other bloke, blurts out: 'No, I'm not!'

"At this all the Generals pounce upon him and ask: 'Why? What do you mean?'

"But he keeps insisting: 'I'm not, I'm not! I,' he says, 'took an oath, I swore by the blood of my comrade, to take no prisoners. I took this oath before people, before my countrymen, to take none alive, to kill them all. And here,' he says, 'an order comes out: take prisoners! So there was disagreement between me and the order, and because of that disagreement, think of it,' he says, 'I lost a decoration: I kept my oath but I disobeyed orders.'

"Comrade Stalin laughed when he heard this: 'I,' he says, 'will plead for you and request that this case be regarded as an exception.' "

Gorodtsov stopped speaking. Smiling his wrinkled smile, he remained silent a long time, absorbed in his recollections. At last he said:

"You will never guess where I saw him the second time.... At Stalingrad."

"He was not there!"

"You may know that he wasn't there, but we, Comrade Colonel, know that he was. You can't keep secrets from the men. Sometimes a big chief may not hear something, but we men know about it. Don't argue—he was there! I

saw him with my own eyes. Of course, he may have been there under some other name, or something like that. I don't know. We men didn't interest ourselves about that. But there's no doubt about it—he was there. Say yourself, could a great big job like that have been done without him? Could we have held out? Not on your life! I was serving under Rodimtsev, in the Thirteenth Guards—we were posted up on the riverbank, near the centre. You could call it a 'zone' or 'part of the city,' if you like, but actually, it was just a strip of ground. One night I was on communication duty at the Battalion C.P. The Germans were about fifty paces away. Dawn was just breaking. Suddenly I saw three men coming from the direction of Regimental Headquarters. I asked for the password in the regulation way and looked—it was he! Although it was still night, you couldn't say it was quite dark—the Germans might see him. He went on a little ahead of the other two and stopped at a machine-gun emplacement. He stood and gazed at the city and put his hand to his eyes. I gasped, and my mate whispers: 'Why do they let him stand there alone? He'll be killed in a minute!' I myself was trembling like a leaf, but I had no right to interfere. I was trembling and want-

ed to shout: 'Go away, Comrade Stalin, we'll manage without you. I don't interfere with your commanding job, so don't interfere with our fighting job. . . .' Here the Germans must have noticed him, because they began to blaze away at that hillock for all they were worth. But he didn't budge. Well, I realized that we've got to be on the alert. We men have our own barometer. I never enquired whether a divisional order has been received or not, but I always knew whether there was going to be an attack or whether there wasn't. An intelligent commander knows that he can't get ahead of his men. I jump to my feet, dash forward and shout 'Hurrah!' The boys, as if they had been only waiting for me, take up the cheer and follow me. I look round and see our flanks coming on too, and behind them some more, and then the fun began! As I am running I can't help looking round. I can see him still standing there. I tell you, we gave the Germans a hell of a 'Stoss' the very ground of Stalingrad shook. After that he took his hat off, waved it to us, and slowly made his way down to the riverside. Here the men agreed among themselves not to retreat another step. If he risks his life like that, then you know. . . . That's how it started. I assure you! I saw it

with my own eyes. And I was not the only one. Lots of men saw him."

"I believe you," said Voropayev. "I believe and envy you."

The legend that Stalin had arrived persisted among the men on all the fronts, and the more hard pressed a particular sector was, the more convinced were the men that he was with them.

Tsimbal came up to Voropayev's bed, looked at the visitor suspiciously and wagged his head.

"You are a discharged soldier, my friend. Have you heard that there is such a thing as a daily timetable? You have! That's good. Because it happens sometimes, you know, that you go to have a chat with a neighbour and you talk his head off."

Gorodtsov got up in confusion and laughed guiltily.

"You are right, quite right," he said, adjusting his belt in embarrassment. "So what do you advise me to do? Remain in these parts?" he suddenly, for no earthly reason, enquired about the only thing that must have interested him at this time, and about which, carried away by his war reminiscences, he had forgotten to ask Voropayev. For the first time dur-

ing all these hours his face betrayed perplexity. "Of course, if I knew I would not be alone, that I would get some backing, so to speak, I ... well, of course, I'd stay."

"Stay, stay! There's a shortage of men here."

"That's what I'm thinking."

"Since your folks have settled here, why break up your home?"

"You are quite right. I was only thinking: I'll be here all alone, without my mates, nobody to talk to and go over old times with, it's like being deaf and dumb. But still, seeing how things are...."

"Are you at the *Mikoyan*?" enquired Tsimbal dispassionately.

"Yes. They got my consent yesterday. They want to put me forward as chairman."

Tsimbal shot a glance of surprise at him.

"But my hands are just itching for wheat," continued Gorodtsov. "I see wheat in my sleep. I'm a combine operator. The moment I wake up I get the smell of wheat. But here," he added mournfully, "you don't grow wheat, you grow grapes, tobacco, small stuff like that. Dull work. Ekh, wheat! I long for it!"

"Go to Kuban," said Tsimbal. "You can get lost in wheat there."

"I would, but my folks are here, settlers; I wouldn't like to desert them. They have given their word and have got a loan, so they can't go back on it now. But grapes are worse than cabbages to me. I'm longing for wheat. Ukh, wouldn't I step on the gas!"

He began to take his leave.

"So you'll stay?" Voropayev asked him.

"Yes, much against my will. But never mind, I'll find something handy to do even here. The god of war must not get lost anywhere, Comrade Colonel. All right, see you again!"

* * *

Voropayev had no illusions about his condition. He was aware that he was entering a difficult period of his life in which nobody could help him.

Shura? She was far removed from his present-day interests.

Of course, he could get a place in one of the sanatoria that were already open, but the idea of being in the position of an invalid was abhorrent to him; and besides, if he did that Seryozhka would remain far away from him.

"A family! Oh, how much a man needed his own hearth, his own nest!"

And here the life Lena was leading rose in his mind.

Voropayev had no intentions whatever towards her. Her life was as hard as his. If they took each other by the hand, the going would be easier, and her small hand and the hardened pads of her fingers had more than once appeared in his morbid dreams.

One day he heard her low voice and was not a bit surprised. She was asking somebody where to find Colonel Voropayev, and on learning where he was she, with noiseless footsteps, entered Tsimbal's yard carrying a small parcel. She wore her invariable felt slippers and a tight black jacket cut like a man's. Her face—when she did not yet know that Voropayev had already seen her and was looking at her from his couch—expressed embarrassment. It was evident that she felt very awkward.

On reaching the house she hesitantly knocked at the door, and when Voropayev called her she started.

"I didn't see you," she said, frowning and smiling. How are you? Mother asked me to visit you. She has sent you something. Take it."

For a moment she held the parcel up and then blushingly placed it on the ground and,

without waiting to be invited, she sat down on the edge of the couch, not daring to look at Voropayev.

"So that's how things are," she remarked, still frowning and smiling. "You are seriously ill, eh?"

"How's Korytov? Is he angry?" asked Voropayev to help Lena out of her embarrassment.

Her answer astonished him.

"I don't know," she said with a light wave of her hand. "I didn't tell him I was going to see you. He'd begin to think all sorts of things, bother him!"

"And what about the house? How is Sophia Ivanovna?"

Before she was able to reply he guessed that her mother too did not know that she was coming here.

"Oh," she exclaimed in a tone of displeasure. "Mother is always thinking up something.... Running around as usual.... Do you know who remembers you? Stoiko, the kolkhoz chairman, that tall man with one arm.... He took a liking to you."

Voropayev recalled the night at the campfire, the tenanting of the houses and the tall handsome man with one arm.

Lena looked round inquisitively at the yard, at the house and at the couch on which Voropayev was lying covered with Tsimbal's winter overcoat. A light smile played round her lips, whether of pity or irony it was difficult to say.

"Not a bad outfit," she said at last, fidgeting with the hem of her jacket. "Do you intend to live here?"

"Why here? I am your partner, am I not? As soon as I get on my feet Sophia Ivanovna and I will see about getting the house done up. I have a suspicion, Lenochka, that you are displeased with my having attached myself to your family, am I right?"

"No, why should I be?" she answered in a whisper. "It's mother's business. I have no time to bother with the house. I have work to do."

"But would you not like to get more firmly on your feet, Lenochka? To have your own orchard, a couple of chickens and a pup, perhaps?..."

She waved her hand in front of her eyes as if brushing a spider thread away.

"I don't know," she answered drily. "I have never thought about any such thing.... I don't know, on my word of honour."

"Lots of work?" he enquired to turn the conversation from a subject that might cause her pain.

"Oh, don't ask. Meeting after meeting, they simply wear me out," she answered, livening up at once, and a smile drove the frown from her face. "They're in such a mess with fuel that it seems hopeless. Gennadi Alexandrovich falls asleep at the telephone, wakes up at the telephone, sends out instructions after instructions, but at the hospital yesterday they burnt up six stools."

Having found a subject for conversation she became more cheerful.

"Who told you I had fallen sick?"

"I heard it at the District Committee. Victor Ogarnov came and he told us. Shirokogorov telephoned twice. Mother is so upset by your illness."

"Afraid I'll give up the house?"

"Yes, she is."

"And you?"

For the first time she raised her searching eyes to his.

"Why should I be afraid of you? I just wanted to say that I owe you an apology. I thought you had come to us to get a country house for nothing. . . ."

Voropayev wanted to say something, but she restrained him.

"Don't be angry with me. Sometimes I say nasty things, but I see all sorts...."

"But actually, I believe you are very kind-hearted, Lena, kind and affectionate. Look, you've come to see me. How did you come? Walked? Did you really? Give me your hand, I want to squeeze it. Did you really come all this way on foot?"

Reluctantly, with an inward struggle, as if there were something improper about it, she offered him her hand and at once got up from the couch to go.

He forcibly detained her.

There was something extraordinarily dignified in her carriage, in her dislike for fine phrases and gestures, in the restrained attention with which she regarded him.

They talked again about his health, about the house, and about the changeable weather.

Dusk fell, and guessing that Lena had actually come on foot, Voropayev did not detain her any longer. The road was deserted.

"Thanks for remembering me, Lena. We shall have a corner of our own, on my word of honour we will. I'll bring my Seryozhka down. Let him romp with your little daughter."

She lowered her eyes, glanced up at him rapidly once or twice to see whether he was joking, but did not answer.

"Well, get better. But take care not to tell anybody that I have been here. I don't like . . ." but without finishing the sentence she walked to the gate, turning round as she went to nod to him in reply to his belated request that she should send him all the letters and telegrams that may arrive for him.

Her light footsteps died away as soon as she reached the village street.

He pondered over her visit for a long time after she had gone. Yes, life was as hard for her as it was for him. He did not yet know whether he would be able to make life easier for her, but he was filled with a keen desire that all should go well with this reticent woman. He began to think that then things would go better for him too. He wanted Lena to live simpler and happier with his assistance. It is nice when there are people in the world whom you want to help.

* * *

. . . They had decided to meet at each house in turn and to start with Tsimbal's, since Voropayev was still unable to get about.

Among those invited were Shirokogorov, Maria Bogdanovna, the matron of the children's sanatorium, the Podnebesko couple from the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz, Gorodtsov and, of course, many from the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz.

To everybody's surprise, Zarubin, the meteorologist, came down from the mountains, a tall, lean man with a tousled, smoke-grey moustache.

From the cool mountain he brought with him the odour of fresh melons, and he spoke about the winds as if they were colleagues of his at the meteorological station.

"The one we had last year was different—fussy and inconstant. But this one is a sturdy fellow, Nordic, self-confident, simply great! I feel cosy with it, almost want to chat with it."

Zarubin had come down to get the newspapers, but on hearing that a social club was to be opened, he stayed in the hope of getting some books. He was passionately fond of long novels.

"Short stories are just a waste of time," he said, blowing his moustache away from his mouth. "The damn things end before you have time to get warm. The zone up there where I am is for novels that take three nights running to read."

Lieutenant Colonel Rybalchenko, who, like Voropayev, had also come to this place to find a quiet haven, but had become the chairman of a fishing kolkhoz, brought three kilos of fresh fish, and Serdyuk, the electrician, brought a map of Europe. Without asking for permission, he carefully hung it on the wall and coughed significantly into his fist. He never parted with this map because he could be called any moment, as he thought, to attend some important meeting to discuss the international situation and at which the lecturer would need a good map. He also brought with him a reed pointer, a box of small flags on pins and two reels of red and blue thread for indicating both fronts at once.

Before the war Serdyuk had been a mechanic at a machine and tractor station. In the army he reached the rank of Guards Captain, and on his discharge after being wounded had no inclination to go back to his former work, so he got a job as an electrician at the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz, although the electric power lines had not yet been restored. He could play the accordion, he visited the district centre on some business or other, conducted an interminable correspondence with someone or other about kolkhoz affairs, and always had about

him an air of extreme occupation, displeasure and, at times, of martyrdom, although everybody knew that he was an inveterate drone, just as there are inveterate drunkards.

"You'd do better, Serdyuk, if you packed up your decorations, and took to the hoe," was the advice Voropayev had given him on their first acquaintance, but Serdyuk had only smiled enigmatically.

"Yakshee, gut, Comrade Colonel, take to the hoe, set to work. But tell me, what work? You talk too generally."

"What do you mean too generally? Take a hoe and stand in the line, it's no use your playing the gentleman."

"Stand in the line with a hoe! Gut. But what about my trade? I'm a mechanic of the purest water, like a diamond. You can't chuck highly-skilled workers about like that!"

But Voropayev saw that this was only his craftiness, that he had something up his sleeve.

"How are you living?"

"Living? Do you call it living? When I've sold the last of my trophies I'll be on my beam-ends."

But here too he was being crafty. He had no trophies except a dozen or so German ordnance maps which he gave out "on hire," and

an accordion which he played all day long, sitting on a bench outside his house, unless he was invited to a party.

He liked this carefree life and tried to prolong it as long as possible, but did not know how to do that.

Just before the meeting started Pausov came running in with a keg of wine on his shoulder. He reported that the Ogarnovs were not coming as Victor was ill and Varvara was staying with him. And finally, just as Voropayev had begun to speak, Tatyana Mikhailovna Zaichik and Katya Muravyova came in. The latter was in charge of the village reading room, conducted the first aid circle and was taking a correspondence course on beekeeping. She was a single woman, and for that reason all the public duties that the other kolkhozniks had no time to attend to were thrust upon her. Only the day before she had been appointed editor of the wall newspaper, and a proposal had been made to send her to take a course on subtropical crops, but this would have meant abandoning all her other duties and so, to everybody's regret, the proposal had to be dropped.

It was expected that Voropayev would deliver a long lecture on the subject of the war. Few knew that Annushka Stupina, who had

returned from German captivity, would be the chief speaker and that Voropayev would only deliver a brief introduction to her talk and make the necessary commentary. Stupina was so overcome with emotion that she was unable to begin and Voropayev was obliged to speak the opening sentences, but she soon recovered her composure and when she began to describe the torments she had experienced on the way and how she had lost her friends, the men in the overcrowded room, as if by word of command, began to smoke, and the women, being less inclined to hide their emotions, began to snivel. And she described her journey through Europe and return home so vividly and interestingly that even the meteorologist, who had been smiling ironically up till now, banged his fist on the table several times, and Voropayev had almost nothing to add.

After Stupina's talk an interval was called. During it, Tatyana Zaichik, in a low voice, trembling as if with fear and ready to break at any moment, supplemented Annushka's confession by relating that her husband, Hariton Ivanovich, accompanied by six other partisans, had come to the village when the Germans were there deliberately for the purpose of agitating against voluntarily going into slavery,

but were captured and tortured to death in the square outside the school.

Voropayev moved that the square outside the school be named Fallen Heroes' Square. The motion was adopted. He also moved that the street in which the fighting had taken place be named Partisan Street, and this too was adopted.

"The saying," he continued, " 'The people gathered from all the gates' can be applied to us. We ought to get acquainted with each other." Looking toward Shirokogorov and thereby attracting everybody's eyes in his direction, he said: "We have among us Sergei Konstantinovich Shirokogorov, the famous wine expert. It would be interesting to listen to him. And we also have among us the winegrower experimenter famous throughout the Soviet Union, a practical man and a war hero, Opanas Ivanovich Tsimbal. I still remember what he told me in Kuban about the different varieties of grapes. We also have among us. . . ."

"Colonel Voropayev!" cried Annushka with loving irrestraint, so loudly that many in the audience fearfully waved to her to keep quiet.

"And we ought to listen to you, Alexei Vitaminich, to you!" came several voices after that.

"I agree! Then we ought to get acquainted with our neighbours. We have as guests here today the Podnebeskos, husband and wife, from the *Pervomaisky*, and Comrade Gorodtsov from the *Mikoyan*, all three, people who have had much experience in life. . . ."

While speaking, Voropayev noticed the first beams of interest play on Serdyuk's listless face; he saw him knit his eyebrows and deeply inhale the smoke of his cigarette several times. It occurred to Voropayev that perhaps this idler and braggart wanted to appear in a different light to the kolkhoz community, to show a side of himself that the people gathered here were not yet aware of.

"Perhaps there are some more? Is anybody in the mood to speak?"

Serdyuk did not ask for permission to speak at once. Wriggling in his seat, his eyebrows still uplifted, and looking down at the floor, he at last said with an air of indifference:

"If on a wider subject . . . well, I'm willing! I've been to America. . . . If that will interest you . . . I'll be glad to oblige. . . ."

Everybody gasped with astonishment. Serdyuk in America?

The interval continued. What is called an interval in big social clubs is part of the "pro-

gram" in small ones. The people sat around and talked. Tsimbal, as the chairman, handed round the wine that Pausov had brought, the fish was fried, and somebody brought in a dozen or so of onions. They ate, pretending it was great fun.

Rybalchenko asked for permission to speak.

"Anna told an interesting story. If all she said were written down, what a wonderful book it would make! Right through Europe, so to speak. I'll let you into a secret, neighbours. I've thought of writing a book about myself. I'm going to call it 'Myself in Five Years' Time.' "

His listeners pricked up their ears. What do you mean?

"Yes, quite simple. Myself in five years' time."

Rybalchenko put his hands into his tunic pocket (he still wore his blue naval tunic), hastily drew out a thick exercise book and waving it in front of the audience said:

"In this, comrades and neighbours, is the whole of myself, my very soul. I have started building a house. . . ."

"He's building a house too," reflected Voropayev with a smile. "What a crowd of builders have got together!"

"Yes, I've started to build a fisherman's house, and I've arranged for everything: an orchard, a kolkhoz orchard I mean—in the third spring. An apiary—in the fourth. At the end of the five years I will paint a picture and hang it in our Red Corner—'The Landing at Kerch'. . . ."

"Lord! Were you there?" Tsimbal got up on his feet in excitement.

"Yes. Are we kinsmen?"

"Of course! Good God, the war has drawn us all together, there are no strangers, we're all kinfolk!"

Then they began to talk about how people had developed during the war, and about their plans for the morrow. . . .

"It would be good to write about the foreigners," proposed Annushka. "I used to interest myself a lot about them before I met them. But when I got to know them I was sorry I had wasted time on them. They don't cut any figure at all."

They touched upon the situation on the fronts. They discussed the prospects of the harvest.

And they would have sat talking like that until cock's crow had the wind not struck the roof. It scampered noisily over the sheet metal

like a playful kitten and leaped silently into the depths of the orchard.

"What a nuisance! It's the signal to break up."

But they spent a long time saying good night, smoked in the yard, and said good night again in the street.

The Podnebeskos were the last to leave.

They wanted to tell Voropayev how that gathering had moved them, and that life would be easier for them now when there were so many nice and interesting people around, but they only pressed his hand and urged him to get on his feet again soon.

And he himself was moved and enthused.

Nothing particular had happened, one would think—they had got together to have a talk and that's all; but it was evident that this was exactly what the people had lacked, they had wanted to clasp somebody's shoulder, to feel somebody's benevolent glance on their faces, and from that alone to feel that they were already stronger on their feet.

It was a long time since Voropayev had been in such close communion with people, and it was a long time since he had felt so well among them as he felt now.

He was not a chief now, he did not decide anything, he was not in charge of anything; but sometimes a man needs a kind listener and a good counsellor.

In one evening Voropayev learned a great deal about what Korytov, probably, never even dreamed.

He lay for a long time with his eyes closed, thinking about the people with whom fate had thrown him together.

He now saw his former war work in a new light.He recalled the best of his company and regimental propagandists.

It was the brave who won. Eloquent orators and the wittiest humorists lost, but often the tongue-tied and the reticent won. It was the "all-outers," those who could do nothing by halves, who won. It was the brave who won, and the surprising thing about it is, they won even in propaganda.

Such people were needed in hoeing vines as much as they were in a bayonet charge. And it was with avowed pleasure that he now thought of the nickname the kolkhozniks had given him. "Vitaminich" sounded like a characterization of himself.

* * *

Every morning, when the sun had barely peeped out of the sea and the first golden rays had shot out, he, from his bed, from his reclining observation post, could already discern through his field glasses Natasha Podnebesko's pomegranate-red frock among the *Pervomaisky* Rieslings.

Yuri was always with her. Evidently, while people were asleep, they hunted for carrots on the old kolkhoz vegetable plots and then stood chewing them, hand in hand, and, like children, admiring the sun as it rose from the greyish horizon.

At that hour there were colour tones in the sky that never appeared again for the rest of the day. The most subtly-greenish lower part passed into an elusively opal, lemon streak, above which there was a dark-blue streak, also very sharp and fine, stretching to the top, and above that, flashing and sparkling, gleamed the radiant morning star, soaring freely over the sea.

Every time Voropayev saw the Podnebesko couple out on their early morning excursion he was overcome with deep emotion. They had gone through a terrific war which had robbed them of the best years of their youth, they had lost their homes and were in broken health,

yet they stood pressing against each other in front of the vast sea and enormous sun, alone against the elements, as happy as they had been on the first day of their love.

Later the Ogarnovs appeared.

There was no need to look for Varvara through field glasses. Her shrill, piercing voice, such as one can hear only in the South, covered the distance almost without waning. Only birds shout like that, pausing only to catch their breath.

Comparing her shrieks with her gestures, Voropayev guessed that the cause of her morning frenzy was Victor Ogarnov, that "official idler" as she called him. She shouted that she was ready to kill him out of the shame she felt before the people who had placed their trust in a parasite like her husband. And these people themselves, may they be four times damned, could find no one better to elect than this "sleepy cripple," and now, no doubt, were laughing at him. Up till now Varvara had been scarcely able to tolerate the fact that her husband had been kept in the shade; now she could not reconcile herself to the fact that he was obliged to work more than the rest.

Probably, the last bar of that trill was aimed at Voropayev—so it seemed to him sometimes

when, peering at fuming Varvara through his field glasses, he caught her nodding towards the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz and even shaking her fist in that direction.

Varvara's shrieks signalled the beginning of the working day. Once that shrieking stopped, nothing disturbed the silence until midday, when she was invariably the first to start a song.

She was an energetic and businesslike woman and lived a righteous life, but you couldn't believe a word she said.

Approximately at the same nameless twilight hour, an engine began to chug on the beach at a spot that Voropayev could not see from where he was, and puffing clouds of smoke, Lieutenant Colonel Rybalchenko's "Pallada," put out to sea. On reaching a point where it could be seen from Tsimbal's house, Rybalchenko sounded his siren. In answer, Voropayev hoisted a red flag on the pole to which the starling box was nailed. This marked the official opening of the day.

Voropayev had now become a sort of talking statue who could be trusted to convey all sorts of messages because he had nothing to do and was always on the spot.

Somebody in the street shouted over the wall:

"Alexei Vitaminich, will you be good enough to tell Shustov, when he happens to pass, that he is wanted at the District Soviet?"

"All right, I'll tell him."

Later he heard heavy, uneven footsteps. He called out:

"Shustov?"

"Yes."

"You're wanted at the District Soviet."

"Thanks. Is Tsimbal in? As soon as he comes, tell him to arrange to get the fertilizer. We've got the order for it."

Annushka Stupina came running in.

"Some little cripple boys have arrived at Maria Bogdanovna's sanatorium. War victims. Poor little things! No arms, no legs.... We've decided to do turns of duty there.... Oh, I nearly forgot! Here's a little parcel for you!" She vanished before he had time to open the parcel. In it he found a piece of bacon fat.

One day the secretary of the Village Soviet came in looking flurried and informed him that somebody had stolen the calendar from his desk.

"What can I do about it?"

"I was thinking, perhaps you'll get to know who. . . ."

But the most touching incident (Stupina told him about it in secret) was that at the second social gathering, at which he was unable to be present, it was decided to complete for him by the summer, at the expense of the kolkhoz, a small cottage that stood without windows or doors next to Tsimbal's house. And one day he even heard somebody in the street shout: "Don't graze your goats in Voropayev's garden! How many times have you to be told about it?"

How many houses he had on his list now! If only he would live. But he was already living to the full measure of his powers.

He had almost no time to think of death now. People came to him with complaints, told him what progress they were making, asked for advice. He wrote letters to people at the front, wrote articles for the regional newspaper, and pondered over the points of a memorandum he intended to send Korytov.

Voropayev had arrived at the conclusion that Korytov was a one-man worker. If he were appointed as a conductor of an orchestra, instead of leading the musicians, he would

probably run from one instrument to another and play them each in turn. But he loved his district with such ardent and lively passion that much could be forgiven him. It was felt however, that if a stronger character were to appear on the scene, all the active people would desert Korytov and flock to the new man.

CHAPTER FIVE

On New Year's eve Ogarnova brought the Colonel his regular R.A.D. ration and the mail. Even before she got to the front gate of Tsimbal's house she pulled up her horse and sat dumbstruck at the scene that met her eyes.

The old man, with huge delight, was hacking at the Colonel's artificial leg with an axe, while the Colonel, hopping about on one leg with the aid of a bamboo cane, was pleading with him to spare at least the metal parts of the contraption.

"You've left me legless! Stop, I tell you!" he was shouting and laughing, but keeping at a respectable distance from Tsimbal, who, swinging the axe, blurted with each stroke:

"Take that! Take that! Let him crawl . . . on his hands . . . and knees!"

"Greetings from the civilian population!" shouted Ogarnova from the gate and emitting a piercing whistle. "Fight to a victorious

finish!" she added, and then beckoned to Voropayev with her eyes, obviously reluctant to enter Tsimbal's disturbed territory.

"What's he up to?" she enquired nonchalantly, cracking sunflower seeds.

"Bother the old devil!" answered Voropayev, puffing and shaking hands with her. "I have to go to work, but he won't let me. What news have you brought, Ogarnova?"

Before handing him the parcel Ogarnova smiled condescendingly and, sighing in a theatrical way, said:

"Well, I've seen that Lena of yours, from the District Committee.... She's not so bad.... What are you beating about the bush for? Go and live with her. My word, she's just the right one for you!"

Voropayev leaned against the horse's shaft, failing to grasp what Ogarnova was driving at. Rummaging in the cart and shifting the things in it about, she continued:

"That's what I told her mother, and she went right off the reel at once. 'It's what I'm dreaming of all the time,' she says, 'to make my Colonel happy, only,' she says, 'I doubt it. He's so proud....' You, she meant."

"Lord, fate had to send me a fool like this!" reflected Voropayev bitterly.

He hopped away from the horse and sat down on a bench.

"Why the blazes are you poking your nose into my affairs, the devil take you! Who asked you to be my matchmaker? You have spoilt my whole life in their house!"

Ogarnova flung a sack of potatoes to the ground, sat down beside him and, laughing through the seed husks on her lips, poked him in the ribs, saying:

"Go along with you! I have spoilt! Tell me, what have you got to spoil?... Perhaps you'll tell me that you don't love her, and that she doesn't love you?... Listen to what I'll tell you.... Lenka's not a bad woman. Take my word for it, she's not. You'll say she has a little girl? But what about it? You have a little boy, and that makes a perfect match.... Oh, don't tell me! I know what your life is like. You haven't had a bath for a month. Your underclothing is as full of holes as a fishing net. You can't fool me!"

She took Voropayev by the arm, drew him towards herself and, gazing into his eyes, said:

"Greetings from all our folks.... At the district conference they praised us, Alexei Vitaminich.... And there was a lot of talk about you too."

They quickly changed roles. He had not expected the news Ogarnova had just told him, and it pleased him all the more for the reason that it helped to turn the conversation.

He inclined his head right close to her eyes.

"Go on, go on. Tell me some more," he said with a pleasant smile.

For a moment, prompted by habit, she wanted to tease him and say that all he had to do now was to mew, that he was like a tomcat who had caught a mouse; but the thought flashed through her mind that this simile would cast reflection upon herself, so she lazily drew herself up, turned her eyes away, feeling his breath on her face, and began, hesitantly, to tell him what he wanted to know. But she soon forgot what he had asked her, and after chatting a while about what they had said at the district meeting, that first they had blamed Voropayev and then had praised him and had set him up as an example to others, she stopped. And in the very next moment she began to chat again about Lena, about Voropayev's house, and about the affairs of the kolkhoz.

From her chatter Voropayev was able to gather that Korytov, whom she had seen a couple of days before, had talked to her for

about an hour, and after every two or three sentences had repeated: "Don't forget to tell this to your Colonel." And in relating this Ogarnova stopped for a moment, coughed, and said in a jocular tone:

"I says to him: 'Why *my* Colonel? What am I, his kolkhoz field friend, or what? He doesn't love me,' I says. But Comrade Korytov stretches out his arms and says: 'That,' he says, 'does not enter into my functions, but you must put this circumstance down for yourself as a matter for further study,' on my word, that's what he said! If you only knew what a joker he is! Later I said to him: 'Let's marry the Colonel to your Lenka, Comrade Korytov. . . .' But he says: 'No! What are you talking about? Take the last of my cadres away,' he says. But I know what cadres are there, and what for," continued Varvara, winking, "so I says to him: 'Why not? He's a man of merit, a big figure and a widower. . . . Ain't that right?' I asks him. 'Yes, that's right, Ogarnova,' he says, 'only wait awhile, let Voropayev get acclimatized, and then. . . .' Oh, he's a sly one, is our Korytov, but I can see through him all right."

Voropayev shook her like a watch that had stopped. She laughed and resumed her tale

about the kolkhoz, and, confused and meagre though her story may have been, one could gather that things were going well there, because the people had gained confidence in their own strength and ability.

"Are things bad here?" she asked, so suddenly that he was obliged to ask her:

"Where? Oh, here? Yes, bad. Very bad."

"Then why don't you show them the way out. You are the only hope."

"I don't see the people here yet. I don't know whom to rely on," he confessed bitterly, but at once regretted having said this.

Ogarnova pounced upon this confession to make it appear that he had just confided something sinful to her and that she had now to share responsibility with him for it.

"But what about us, Alexei Vitaminich, did you know us?" she asked, as if reminding him about something personal. "Me, for instance. You did not know me at all until I bumped into you. By God, I almost wanted to kill you then, do you know? But later I got so attached, as if you were my kinsman. My Victor even began to get jealous, you know. 'You and your Colonel are bungling up all my work,' he says. Fancy saying a thing like that, the scoundrel!" she concluded with

obvious delight, proud of her husband's suspicion.

In his embarrassment Voropayev began to sort out the letters she had brought him.

"Time for me to go?" lazily enquired Ogarnova, tidying her hair and turning her back on a passing kolkhoznik as if wishing to remain unrecognized.

"Yes," answered Voropayev drily. "Give my greetings to everybody," and he hopped to the house, fuming against everything in the world, and above all against that damned Ogarnova.

* * *

"If it is your intention to die in your godforsaken seaside place, leave orders to have your coffin covered with my letters.

"I write you nearly every day and will continue to write until you answer.

"I am not asking you how you are living, a man like you cannot live well, but prefer to tell you about myself so that you may know where I am.

"As you know, we passed through Rumania long ago and it is now almost forgotten.

"One is amazed by the multitude of monuments to great Rumanians, for there is

literally not a town or a village where there are no monuments to someone or other.

"Transylvania is less ornate than Rumania proper, but it has more to eat. At present we, that is I and our corps, are in Hungary. What can I tell you about this country?

"Unfortunately, it does not in the least resemble the country I had known something about from Illes' novels. Hungary is sort of medieval above everything else. Castles, köntöses, stags' horns, genealogical tables, curly-haired wild boars that were fashionable in the fifteenth century, sauces made with red pepper and wonderful songs, incredibly audacious popular melodies, and the magnificent Budapest Opera, but about all this later, later, later.

"When you read that our Third Ukrainian broke through the enemy's defences southwest of Budapest, did not your heart jump from joy with anticipation that our corps was right in front?

"Well, then, rejoice! Ours was in front!

"Near Bichka, Georgi Petrovich's division was surrounded, but the men fought like fiends. He was given permission to transfer his command point outside the ring, but he refused. I could have kissed him.

"I am sorry that I am alone and that there is nobody interested enough to notice how brave I have become lately. This is not out of vanity, but out of loneliness.

"I am behaving more bravely, but also more cautiously. Can't you guess why? I want to live to see Victory Day! When I get my discharge from the army I will have a gigantic struggle with you before me. I want to be the victor in that struggle, and I am now acquiring the necessary experience for it.

"I am not writing anything about my work now because I don't know how far it still interests you, although I want awfully to boast about some things. All your friends are alive.

"You need not write to me, you need not torment yourself with the thought that you are causing me pain, you need not feel guilty towards me. You ought only to remember me, dream about me, and wait for me, you wretched man.

A. G."

"No, what's the use of thinking about it. It's settled, so let it remain settled," reflected Voropayev, biting his lips. "Where shall I bring her to? The idea's absurd! Live with

her at Zhurina's, or wander from kolkhoz to kolkhoz like gypsies? No, no!"

He did not attempt to read the other letters from the front, but opened the triangular-folded letter from Sophia Ivanovna Zhurina. He unfolded it—and became absorbed in it as if it were a fabulous dream.

Sophia Ivanovna informed him—at first he would not believe a word of it—that she had received a loan on his behalf, that she had had the roof repaired, had bought window glass, had dug up the whole yard "for vegetables or whatever else you like," had acquired a pair of iron gates, had collected enough limestone to build a shed, had planted three hundred strawberry shoots and had acquired a wolfhound pup, and now she timidly enquired what his plans were for the future and whether, perhaps, he had given up the idea of keeping house with her. In careful terms she informed Voropayev that she had warned the matron of the kindergarten of the early arrival from Moscow of a certain ("responsible," as she put it in the letter) boy, and that her little granddaughter Tanechka was also impatiently waiting for the arrival of her playmate from Moscow. The weather in the vicinity of their house, in Sophia Ivanovna's opinion, was

much better than in any other part of the street. She assured him that the wind from the mountains avoided their plot, while the fog from the sea dispersed before it reached it. She vowed that there was more sunshine on their plot than on the neighbouring ones and, consequently, their vegetables and fruit will be more delicious.

"And my Lenochka has got completely out of hand with her District Committee work," she confided to him, "and as regards the house she says: 'I'm not the mistress, you and the Colonel are the chiefs, I am only the lodger.' Well, I make that lodger pay in kind. On her day off I make her dig the garden."

On the whole, his houses had cut through, like wisdom teeth.

Of course, he had made a mistake in leaving the army. A regular Political Officer, knowing two languages and with war experience, he was needed now more than ever before, because the army will remain in Europe a long time, and it will be necessary to train for this service the men who will come to Berlin from the banks of the Irtysh or the Amu Darya.

His hand reached out again for the letters from the army, but he had not the courage

to open them. He knew beforehand everything they might contain. He shut his eyes and saw the dear faces of his old friends; a pain shot through his heart and everything around him at once grew dull and tedious. That's where he ought to be, dammit, out there!

"I'll go! I absolutely must! I can't stay here any longer!" But suddenly he remembered what he was, and he banged his fist on the table.

"Is it me you are calling?" enquired Opanas Ivanovich conciliatingly through the partition. "Like in a tavern; you call not by word of mouth, but by banging the table."

"Forgive me, Opanas Ivanovich. It's from grief."

"You'd do better to tidy yourself up a bit, there will be people there."

"What people? . . . Oh! It's New Year's Eve tonight! What a memory I have!"

Those words found a painful echo in his heart, as if the coming festival promised not joyous hopes, but still more bitter disappointment and misfortune. But Victory was already peeping round the corner of the New Year! Was that a trifle?

"But you've chopped up my leg, how will I be able to go?"

"I chopped it up because we ordered a new one for you. A New Year's gift. Here you are! Appreciate our love for you."

And Opanas Ivanovich Tsimbal brought in from behind the partition a wonderful artificial leg made by some self-trained inventor in the regional capital, to whom the kolkhoz had sent a special messenger.

* * *

Voropayev and Opanas Ivanovich had been invited to the New Year Fir-Tree celebration at Maria Bogdanovna's children sanatorium, about three kilometres from the kolkhoz.

The matron was a friend of Opanas Ivanovich's. He tended her vines and acted as her "general adviser," as he put it.

They had received the invitation two days ago, drawn in coloured pencil by the children themselves. They could not very well refuse the invitation, and besides, what sense was there in sitting at home alone when they could be among people and share with them the hour of all mankind's hopes and expectations.

They went out while it was still light so as to get there without hurrying.

Much had changed in nature since the time he took to his bed. Then everything had been

in golden splendour, rolling in thousands of different shades of colour, radiant without the sun. But now everything was a monotonous drab-grey, and stood out distinctly as through a stereoscope. Nature played with the perspective, the light shone through the woods and opened new vistas which, in turn, showed that behind them were the sea and cliffs, and beyond the mountains and the sea—the sky. Everything seemed transparent and lacking body. Dusk fell very quickly. Night set in at once.

. . . Unusual was that southern, New Year's night, warm, impregnated with the spicy, almond smell from the long withered but not yet fallen blossoms of the medlar trees.

The sea could no longer be seen, but its whereabouts could be guessed at a distance from a sort of freedom of the air and the disappearance of all the firm lines to which the human eye is so accustomed, and among which it feels so serene. Out there, all sounds, all the clouds, all the stars, plunged into the misty vacuum of the sea, now as unreachable as the sky, and vanished.

Two days ago a storm had burst over the kolkhoz. Fierce streaks of lightning had stabbed the earth, thunder roared, and the rain had

come down in such a deafening torrent as occurs only in the hottest part of the summer. Meanwhile, the crests of the mountains were covered with deep snow, and wonderful and frightful was the reflection of the lightning on its leaden-grey surface, from which protruded the green spires of the solitary, twisted pines that had clambered to those heights.

"After all, a Russian without snow is nothing," said Voropayev laughing. "I never liked the heavy frost in our parts, but now I see snow in my sleep, crackling trees and the moon, huge, like a porthole looking into another world. Wonderfully good...."

"I don't long for anything," said Tsimbal. "Give me mountains—I'll get accustomed to mountains. Give me the sea—I'll not get lost in that. I'll tell you what I think, Alexei Vitaminich, the Russian is an artist among men."

"You have put that wonderfully well: the Russian is an artist among men. He can depict and feel everything. He can appreciate the culture and customs of other peoples and remain true to himself. Yes, it's simply amazing how well you put it! That is why we are so exacting towards ourselves—we are an artist people."

Prudent Maria Bogdanovna had sent Stupina with her girls to meet them.

The girls surrounded the wayfarers and, stepping on each others toes, gasping and apologizing, they broke into song and guided them to the house.

The fancy-dress ball was already in full swing when, embarrassed by their latecoming, they, amidst hundreds of inquisitive glances, entered the large hall, in the middle of which stood a pine tree hung with homemade toys and thickly-coated with cotton wool at the base.

The long line of children in every kind of fancy dress had already filed in. Somebody called out: "One-two-three!" The accordion player struck up a tune, and the children, hesitantly at first, caught it up and sang lustily:

Surrender all your records
Old Year, you set the pace.
A jolly Young Octobrist
Is coming to take your place.

The line was led by a strapping, broad-hipped young woman with a gold-paper crescent moon pinned in her thick, tousled hair.

"Twice she escaped from a German concentration camp," all-knowing Tsimbal informed Voropayev.

Behind the girl came prancing a lad of about thirteen, minus his right arm, got up like a highlander, with black, cotton-wool moustaches, a tall fur hat made from an old squirrel muff and a cloak made of a fluffy blanket.

He was followed by a tiny "doctor" about six years old, wearing a white skullcap with a red cross and a white robe, from the pocket of which amusingly peeped a stethoscope. In addition, the "doctor" wore a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles without glasses, which did indeed give him a markedly learned air.

Next came a butterfly girl with wings made of wire and cotton gauze dyed with red streptocide; a "Ryazanskaya peasant woman" wearing a peasant's frock and bast shoes; a "tankist" in top boots made from oilcloth; a "Don Cossack" with a broad red stripe down each side of his short breeks and riding a wooden horse, which had whiskers for some reason; a "cook" carrying frying pans, and "Alexander Nevsky" in armour made from silvered-paper chocolate wrappers.

And all this was so touching, so charming and so poverty-stricken that one simply wanted to cry from some sort of joyous emotion. To hell with wealth!

Ranged round the walls were the adult guests, blinking their excessively glistening eyes, wiping flushed faces and silently watching the children's procession.

Maria Bogdanovna Merezhkova, the matron of the sanatorium, gave the impression of being a sturdy woman in every respect. Her strong legs confidently bore her conspicuously strapping figure. Her arms were developed like those of an athlete. Her step was measured and precise as if she were not just walking, but marching to the strains of a military band which she alone heard.

"We have been waiting for you," she said reproachfully, taking Voropayev by the arm to conduct him to another part of the house. "The children have been wanting to see you for a long time, but as you are late, I will be able to introduce you only to some of them."

They passed out of the hall into a dark, glass-covered gallery and reached the rooms at the back of the house from which came the sounds of the radio.

"These are my philosophers," said Merezhkova, opening a door from which the sounds were coming.

Voropayev had not been warned about the place he was being led to and about what he

would see, and so he involuntarily winced when he found himself in the room where, on five beds moved to a table, lay five mutilated childish figures. The radio was broadcasting a concert from Moscow. The children were listening attentively to the music and turned with displeasure to the people entering the room.

Merezhkova motioned to the children to switch off the radio, but evidently they did not understand her, and while she continued her mute explanation Voropayev cautiously glanced round the room. Two paces away from him lay a girl with her chin propped up on her fingerless hands. She was thirteen or fourteen years old, and had bright-blue eyes that almost looked as if they had been painted, and a thin, thoughtful face framed in a mass of dark chestnut hair. At first sight she elusively reminded one of Vrubel's "Tamara," but this literary comparison proved to be incorrect, for there was nothing romantic about this girl. She was completely unartificial. Next to her, nearer to the radio receiver, stood a half-empty bed, on which, with head down, lay a very small boy, or rather, part of a boy. Voropayev managed to discern a bristly head, a thin neck, unnaturally thin shoulders, and a pencil in the boy's mouth. With the pencil held in this

way the boy was drawing something in a scrapbook. Suddenly guessing why the boy looked so short, Voropayev blushed and shamefacedly turned his eyes away, but they had nothing to rest on in this quiet, musical room. Now he saw a legless little fellow squatting pertly at the very edge of the table like a mushroom. Evidently he was the monitor of the group, for it was with him that Maria Bogdanovna was exchanging signs to have the radio switched off. The fifth figure was that of a lad with bad sight, or no sight at all. He lay with his hand over his blue-spectacled eyes and, seemingly, was not aware of the visitor's presence.

"I have brought Comrade Voropayev to see you," said Maria Bogdanovna in a didactic tone. "You have long wanted to meet and talk with him. Please, sit down, Alexei Veniaminovich."

Striking his artificial leg loudly against a chair, Voropayev awkwardly took a seat. All the children turned their heads towards him and with an adult air looked him up and down with such a cold stare that he felt a chill run down his back.

"We know you already, Comrade Voropayev," said the blue-eyed girl, starting the

conversation. "We have been told a lot about you. Have you heard about us?"

"No, I must confess, I have heard nothing about you. I am sorry, but that is my fault. . . ."

"It's a good thing you haven't heard about us," interrupted the girl, brushing her hair back with a nervous motion of her hand and exposing a beautifully moulded forehead. She was nervous because, as Voropayev guessed, she was speaking on behalf of all the children.

"It's a good thing you didn't know about us, otherwise you would have come in with a different face, already sad. We so rarely see a happy face, you know. What I mean is, even happy people become sad when they are with us."

Voropayev realized at once that not a single word of untruth could be uttered here.

"Well, I don't think being in your company will upset me," he said. "I am almost like you all, and if we reckon my internal complaint we needn't say 'almost.' Introduce them to me, Maria Bogdanovna."

"We'll introduce ourselves, we'll introduce ourselves!" The girl tried to close her little, expressive, fingerless hands. "I am Zina Kuzminskaya, from Smolensk. Papa is a partisan.

Well, they came and wanted me to say where he was. I wouldn't tell them. So right there, in our room, they put my hands on the edge of the table. And do you know, the idiotic thing is that they were not searching for my Dad, but for some other partisan."

She paused, being of the opinion that she had said enough about herself, and turned to the boy with the truncated body, next to her.

"This is our 'Rolypoly,' Shura Naidenov. He is our senior because he is worse off than all of us. He was hurt in an air raid."

"Rolypoly" irritably dug his pencil into the paper and said in a low voice:

"Go on."

"He has no arms and no legs. He can read and can write with a pencil in his mouth. He turns the pages over himself with a piece of rubber, and he can even move about a little. That's why he is our senior, he can do more than all of us.

"And that boy next to the radio is Petya Bunchikov. The Germans drove him and his father and mother across a mine field. He has no legs. That one in the glasses is Lyonechka Kovrov. He can't see yet, but they say he will be able to soon. He was caught in an air raid too. He is our junior, because he can do the

least and is unhappy for the time being, not like the rest of us."

"In that case, I'm the junior here, even below Kovrov," said Voropayev. "Because I have only one leg, which, of course, is not very important, I have lost three ribs, which is quite a trifle, and I have a totally superfluous hole in my lung and several holes in my body—nothing worth talking about."

"What is worth talking about?" enquired "Rolypoly" in a challenging tone without raising his head.

"Don't bristle up like that! I wasn't joking. It's much harder for you, than it is for me, that's true. But in my position it's not easier for me than it is for you."

Zina gleefully clapped the round stumps of her hands.

"I love riddles like that!"

"Rolypoly" wriggled up closer like a fish in order to see and hear better.

"Why?" he enquired, wrinkling his brow.

"Because, my dear boy, I have a little son, he's sick, and I'm not strong enough yet to pull for two."

He paused for a moment and the thin logical thread that was guiding him suddenly snapped.

"Yes, but you can walk and do as you like, but I can't even put a piece of bread in my mouth," interjected Naidenov resentfully. "Look how much fighting you've seen," he added, nodding towards the Medal ribbons on Voropayev's breast. "But I. . . ."

"I fought for you, children."

"Were you on the Western?" enquired legless Bunchikov anxiously. "I'm from the Western."

"Yes, I was on the Western. So we are kinsmen."

"If I hadn't been blown up I'd have gone on with my front right to Berlin. General Slavin d'you know him?—he became like a father to me, he wouldn't let me go, but I could understand it myself—what use would I be!"

"That's enough, that's enough!" said exuberant Zina, interrupting Bunchikov. "Better let Comrade Voropayev tell us something about the war."

"I won't tell you anything tonight. Let's be merry. By-the-by, why don't you go and see the fir tree?"

"They are shy," said Maria Bogdanovna. "I've been persuading and persuading them. But they won't go."

"You are crazy, children! You don't mean to tell me you are ashamed of your wounds! Haven't there been lots of clever men and good workers who were physically disabled? One great mathematician was blind from birth. And what about our Soviet writer Nikolai Ostrovsky? In what way was he better off than Naidenov? According to you, I ought to be ashamed to show my face anywhere, is that it? Is that what you advise me to do? But I won't! My leg was cut off not because I was a thief, or a bandit, I lost it in battle. It is the highest award of honour I possess, children. There is no shame in the fact that I have only one leg, Bunchikov none, and Naidenov not even arms. Children, we are soldiers, not rogues. Hey!... Opanas Ivanovich!"

The latter strode into the room and instinctively stood to attention, so peremptory was the sound of Voropayev's summons.

"Call somebody to roll the beds out!"

Svetlana and Annushka came running in.

"I'll lead the column. Naidenov will come behind me, Zina behind Naidenov, Bunchikov behind her. Svetlana Chirikova will follow Kovrov as his secretary."

"I don't want to be made a laughingstock!" Naidenov cried out in a frightened voice, but

it was evident that this was the last flash of his already vanquished shyness.

"Maria Bogdanovna, please go and announce that the war children are coming. And let everybody rise as we come in."

The singing game was started all over again. The broad-hipped nurse with the golden moon in her hair rearranged the procession. The beds with the invalids were placed in the line. After the first two or three moments of shyness had passed the children forgot everything except the game.

Voropayev retired to the group of adults.

Standing away from them, the sight of these crippled children was still more moving, and when, propped up by pillows, "Rolypoly," his voice trembling with emotion, recited *Mtsiri* and passionately declaimed the lines: "Two such lives for one, but one full of strife, would I give, if that could be done," there was not a person in the room that was not thrilled by the will to live that radiated from that tiny being with the stubborn, bristly head.

"He wants to be a scientist," the guests whispered to each other. "Merezhkova is teaching him English. 'You wait,' he says. 'I will show those Germans what a Russian is even if he's got no arms and legs.'"

Tsimbal came up.

"You'll see, when they grow up!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Heroes, that's what they'll be! When I look at that Naidenov I say to myself: 'Tsimbal, you're good for nothing!' Good Lord! . . ." and with a gesture of emotion he went away.

Seeing that nobody was watching him, Voropayev slipped out on to the dark staircase and went down into the garden. The spring-like airiness of the night had gone, leaving no trace. The wind raced through the garden, ruffled the bushes, swept up the heavy sand on the paths, played with the branches and hissed and whined in the crowns of the pine trees. Far away the forest boomed like the sea in a heavy storm.

And this commotion in nature, her alarmed unrestraint, were akin to the feeling that now overcame Voropayev.

The night was pitch dark, but he suddenly decided to go home.

* * *

That weird hour in which the faint human heart, always filled with hope for the future, so strongly believes, the mysterious hour of the New Year, drew near. What, in the end, will

it bring? What joy, what happiness? It was time, high time!

The darkness was so dense that it made one feel giddy. The sky, the air, the woods, the road winding down to the sea, the red cliffs in front of the vineyards, the kolkhoz houses, and lastly, the ever present sea, were now obliterated, were merged in one mass of blinding, diabolically roaring, horribly abysmal blackness.

He groped his way along with outstretched hand. Several times he was prompted to turn back and vanity alone restrained him from doing so. At last, casting aside all shame, he dropped to the ground and crawled on his belly. He even felt merry over it.

Suddenly his absence will be discovered and nobody will believe that he was making his way home alone. Only Naidenov, perhaps, will believe and respect him for it. The vision of that stubborn lad stood before his eyes.

This slow crawling, however, wearied Voropayev to the point of nausea, and when, at last, he reached the familiar track near the precipice, he was perspiring and gasping. He crawled to the edge of the precipice and stopped enraptured. The only thing he felt as space

was the darkness, and in it the dull, rolling echo of the creaking trees, of the pebbles streaming down and of the sea striking the beach, the echoes of noises that made one feel afraid....

Nothing existed in nature now but sounds, he could almost feel them.

He lay on the edge of the precipice like a bird with a broken wing.

It is said that the body is nothing, spirit is everything. This, of course, is an exaggeration. But, on the other hand, it was not his leg, not his sound chest and healthy lungs that had made him the former Voropayev whom he now envied because he would never be like him again. Had he given up thinking of Goreva only because he had an artificial leg and spat blood, and was therefore no good to her?

And what about Naidenov? That boy, with no arms nor legs, but dreaming of his future, was so great that Voropayev forgot about himself and could now think of nothing but that child.

The wind struck him in the back and blowing his overcoat out like a sail pushed him towards the precipice. Were he to let go of the boulder at which he was clutching

convulsively, his body would have plunged into the vacuum like a log on the beach caught up and driven forward by the furious, surging tide.

"But no! It must not be! It is not worth while."

"A happy New Year, Sergunka!"

"A happy New Year, dear Shura!"

"May you all be happy!"

His thoughts of Goreva were followed by recollections of his other close friends and he smiled to them too from the distance. Good luck and happiness to them all! To all those whose souls had, even if only once, touched his own!

He lay gazing into the abysmal sea and spoke to himself aloud:

"My dear ones, will you ever remember Alexei Voropayev, or, no longer mentioned in communiqués and despatches, no longer appearing in the columns of the military journals, has he vanished forever from your hasty memories as someone not fated to cross your paths again?"

No, he did not think that he was forgotten any more than he had forgotten any of them, even though, sometimes, he could not remember their names or recall their faces.

You cannot forget what has become part of yourself.

One night we may all dream the same dream and, on waking up, may think to ourselves: how great, how strong and inseparable is our family—our generation.

CHAPTER SIX

"Dear Friend,

"How we miss you! How much all of us who know you need your stern logic and ability to generalize the slightest events!

"We are hurtling into the interior of Europe with meteoric speed.

"Yesterday I dressed the wound of a descendant of the Rumanian Admiral Mourjesco who performed the first and only more or less important naval feat in the history of the Rumanian Navy, of that same Mourjesco who, in 1878, participated with our sailors Shestakov and Dubasov in sinking the Turkish monitor 'Haji-Rakhman' in the Danube.

"Today I talked to a Hungarian magnate who traces his ancestry back to the fourteenth century. He invited me to his castle on the Danube and promised to show me a portrait of Paul I with the tsar's autograph addressed to this General's great-grandfather, and he

was convinced that in this way he could curry favour with our Command.

"I have met old Social-Democrats who knew Lenin, I have met Anarchists, Communists, Russian Whiteguards, Georgian Mensheviks and Armenian Dashnaks, but to my great surprise I have not met any fascists. One would think that there had never been any here.

"For several days I lived in the cottage of a village dressmaker. In one of the compartments of the chest of drawers she allowed me to use I found a heap of unfinished flags with the swastika. She did not even deem it necessary to hide them.

" 'What is this?' I asked the mistress of the house. She answered with a shrug of the shoulders: 'Who knows? I received an order to make three or four hundred of these things and I was never interested enough to enquire what they were.'

"The whole of Europe reminds me of this dressmaker. Nobody knows anything about fascism. I met a person who had worked for the Slovakian Quisling Tiso, and he went into raptures over the Slovakian partisans and over our Russian lads who had fought shoulder to shoulder with the Slovaks. 'But you are a fascist,' I said to him. He was extremely

offended. 'I a fascist? The Slovaks were playthings of Hitler,' and he went on and on and in the end I almost apologized to him.

"Our impressions are like waves in a storm.

"Through thirty-five hands I received your dry New Year's greetings. To tell the truth, I was hurt, but I asked that you be informed that I fainted with delight.

"Good Lord, at least write to me about how you are sowing, or manuring the crops, or doing something else practical.

"I am in a great hurry and that is why I am writing briefly this time.

A. G."

* * *

In the beginning of February Korytov called a special meeting of the leading men of the district without announcing the agenda.

Voropayev, who had been back from the kolkhozes a long time and was now preparing a course of lectures on the history of the Party, decided not to go to this meeting, but to stay at home and have a talk with his "semi-landlady," Sophia Ivanovna, Lena's mother. But he had an additional reason for staying at home this evening: after Ogarnova's interference, his relations with Lena's mother had

assumed an unpleasant, strained and quarrelsome character. He had got it into his mind that the old woman was determined to get him as her son-in-law, while she, worried by her partner's bad temper, and fearing a rupture, strained every nerve to improve matters and only made them worse. A frank, heart-to-heart talk could be postponed no longer, and Voropayev could not help feeling pleased that Lena would be home late that evening owing to the meeting and he and the old woman would have the place to themselves.

They did not light the lamp, but sat near the blazing brick stove which Sophia Ivanovna herself had built. They opened the stove door and the light of the fire played on the dark walls. Tanechka climbed on to Voropayev's knees and—chubby and charming—curled up cosily with her back to the fire.

"Well now, Sophia Ivanovna, what claims have you on me?" enquired Voropayev with a sigh.

After clearing her throat hoarsely, Sophia Ivanovna began to enumerate them. Her arguments amounted to this: the repairs to be done in such a way as to "bring things into the house and not take things out of it," "to make the house pay and not pay for the house." To

achieve this she proposed that the repairs be put off until the spring, as all wise people were doing, because when the authorities began to repair the big sanatoria they would be able, in between, to help Voropayev repair his house. She further proposed that advantage be taken of the winter to build a pigsty and a henroost, and to collect potash and manure.

"Because, after all, Alexei Veniaminich, is it only a matter of the rooms? If you want to be a wise man, Alexei Veniaminich, you ought to go in for a bit of trading. What are you growling at me for?"

"You ought to have a little shame, Sophia Ivanovna."

"Shame? What's there to be ashamed of? I've been ashamed all my life, but what have I got for it? Going about in rags, and a burden on my daughter."

And, as happened every day, they entered into a heated argument.

Voropayev tried to convince the old woman that in taking the lease of the house he had had no intention of making a business of it and living on the income. All he wanted was a corner of his own.

On the other hand, the old woman, not listening to what he was saying, and contin-

ually interrupting, tried to convince him that he had drawn her into an unprofitable undertaking, that when going into partnership with him she had calculated on being able to make a living out of the plot. Then she reminded him that she had promised to look after Voropayev and his son and said that, indeed, she wanted the Colonel to have his meals and his place kept tidy, but she hadn't got, and did not expect to have, the money to buy eggs and butter for him in the market, and besides, he was not the only one she had on her hands, and who knew what was still in front of her in her life?

She did not say that it was high time Voropayev settled down with a family, the thing she had been calculating on ever since her talk with Ogarnova and what she was impatiently waiting for, because when that did happen she would be able to talk in an entirely different strain.

She did not say anything like this, but from the expression on her face and the tone of her reproaches Voropayev guessed what she had in mind and he answered her just as plainly, although also not openly.

"No, no! I will ruthlessly check every attempt you make to become a market

woman," he said at last, getting up carefully and taking Tanechka, now fast asleep, in his arms. "Ruthlessly, I say. Bear that in mind."

The old woman too got up.

"That means that I've got to get out, eh? Thanks, Alexei Veniaminich, thanks. I looked after you like a mother, and this is the gratitude you show me!"

"Why have you to get out? What gives you that idea? You are saying that to spite me!" he shouted, really angry now.

And the dispute developed into an altercation that threatened an open rupture.

The rupture would undoubtedly have taken place that very evening had not Lena burst into the room at the crucial moment, puffing and flushed from rapid walking.

In spite of her habitual calm restraint, both the old woman and Voropayev had a feeling that she had brought important news, and both fell silent and looked at her expectantly.

Remaining at the door, she glanced swiftly round the room and finding her little daughter in Voropayev's arms she lifted her eyebrows and smiled, and that smile suited her admirably.

Her face, lit up by the flickering flames of the stove, kept emerging from the gloom and receding again, and this made it appear as if it were twitching nervously.

"Alexei Veniaminovich, put your coat on at once and come to the District Committee," she said in an imperative tone, giving no explanation. And, as if brooking no objection on his part, she hurriedly took his overcoat down from the clothes rack, saying: "It's awfully slippery! You must take a stick and a lantern too."

As if there had been no quarrelling or altercation, Sophia Ivanovna began to lament and wail.

"Where are you dragging him to?" she shouted at Lena. "Do you want to kill him? He's a sick man, and she takes it into her head to go for a stroll in this weather!"

She made no attempt to detain Voropayev, however, evidently feeling that he could not stay if her daughter had come running for him, heaven knows where from, in weather like this.

Voropayev glanced at Lena. Her invariable black stockings and felt slippers adorned her thin, strong, girlish legs and feet.

"Sophia Ivanovna, my boots!"

The old woman briskly dropped down on her hands and knees and pulled out from under the bed a pair of top boots that he had had made for holiday wear when he was still a biped, and which had long been got out to be sold at the Sunday old-clothes market.

For a moment Sophia Ivanovna's face expressed perplexity. The housekeeper came into conflict with the mother. And perhaps she would have begun to persuade Voropayev not to part with these brand new boots had not Lena blurted out that she did not need them.

The old woman was furious when she was contradicted.

"Put them on when you are told!" she shouted, shaking the boots. "Did you ever see such a contrary person in all your life?"

Lena frowned still more deeply and, no longer smiling, said in a barely audible voice:

"All right, I'll put them on. Give me a pair of clean stockings."

Although it was winter, her legs were sunburnt, and her cold, red feet looked pitiful, almost childish.

"Put some wadding in, some wadding," her mother shouted, pleased when she saw

Lena trying the boots on. "Take care not to damage the welts on the stones!... Now your feet will be warm! Take him along now, quickly, since he must go!"

It was a dark, cold night with a piercing wind. Fine, prickly snow was being blown from the mountains. The sidewalks, on which the puddles were frozen, were so slippery that the few pedestrians who were out cautiously walked in the middle of the road.

"You want to cripple me, Lenochka," said Voropayev, shaking his head. "D'you think I'll be able to get there?"

She took his arm and said emphatically:

"You must, Alexei Veniaminovich, you absolutely must be there."

"What's on the agenda?"

Lenochka halted and confidingly gripping Voropayev's elbow with her strong, lean hands, a thing she had never done before, she said:

"Something is going to happen here, Alexei Veniaminovich, something very, very important."

And she told him what she had just heard at the District Committee: that American and British ships were expected, that many strangers had turned up at the District Committee,

and that Korytov had enquired about Voropayev several times and was angry because he had not yet arrived.

"You are a staunch supporter of Korytov, Lenochka. Loyal to him unto death, eh?"

"I am always good to a good man," she answered vaguely, confidently leading him further.

For a long time they walked on in silence.

It was Voropayev who broke the silence with the startling question:

"Lenochka, did your mother say anything to you about a conversation she had with a woman named Ogarnova? About a month ago?"

"Yes, of course she did. I laughed until I nearly choked."

"Take care you don't choke now, Lenochka, because if I'll be left alone, I'll be done for.... That Ogarnova was right, let me tell you. Yes, let's live together."

"But we are already living together," answered Lena shyly, trying to pass it off as a joke.

"No, no! I mean really together, in one family, the children in one drove, eh?"

"Gracious! Whatever's got into your head?" —her voice trembled and broke, she struggled for breath. "You, at least, shouldn't make fun

of me. Drop that, Alexei Veniaminovich. Perhaps my husband is still alive.... Why do you say things like that? ..."

Voropayev could understand Lena's confusion. It even pleased him. There is nothing a woman dreads, not even deception, as much as she dreads ridicule, yes, ridicule.

"I am not making fun of you, and not deceiving you, Lena. It is hard for me to live alone, and it is much harder for you. Let us unite."

"Don't, Alexei Veniaminovich, don't, don't!" she repeated in a passionate, frightened whisper, evidently not hearing what she herself was saying. "Don't, Alexei Veniaminovich, don't!"

"But don't what?" he burst out impatiently.

"Don't hurry like that, we'll both stumble," she answered with grim irony in her voice, changing the subject; and he pictured her at this moment frowning and with a smile playing around the corners of her mouth. He understood: she had heard all he had said and would think about it, and it seemed to him that the fact that she had not definitely rejected his proposal was a good sign. It would have been unwise to press the matter further now.

"As for the preparations that are being made at the District Committee, I think some big events are going to take place here, believe me," he said.

"I always believe you," she answered simply and significantly. "Even when I don't want to believe, still, I do."

There! That was her confession!

"Thanks, Lena."

And they did not say another word until they reached the District Committee headquarters, outside of which numerous tiny lights were glimmering, there was a strong smell of makhorka tobacco and the restrained murmur of male and female voices which could be heard even at a distance.

* * *

When Voropayev entered the secretary's office the meeting was already drawing to a close. Korytov glanced at the clock and then at Voropayev and shook his head angrily. They were drawing up a list of people to be responsible for each block in tidying up the town, and another list of unofficial interpreters from among the schoolteachers.

"You will excuse me, Colonel," said Korytov spitefully and loftily before Voropayev had

reached the table, "but without asking your consent we have given you the following job: to be supernumerary interpreter in exceptional cases of city-wide importance, so to speak. And you must take up your quarters here, so that you can quickly be found whenever you are wanted. Do you understand? Starting from tomorrow morning, bear in mind."

The district Party workers welcomed the appointment of Voropayev as interpreter with indescribable enthusiasm.

On all sides people pulled him by the coat and whispered in his ear: "They say they'll be here tomorrow, is it true?" or "Is it true that Molotov called Korytov up on the telephone?"

A Colonel who was present for some reason, jotted down Voropayev's address and said vaguely: "In case," and an unknown Major of the State Security Service put a few running questions to him in English, and evidently satisfied, stepped away, but at once came back again and, drawing him aside, explained to him that he was not likely to be called upon to perform exceptionally important duties.

"Except, perhaps, if the Americans and English start a scrap with each other, it will be your duty to pacify them."

Pausov questioned him at length about whether Americans eat salt herring with onions, and whether it was the proper thing to offer them tea.

So as not to disturb Korytov, who had entered into some sort of secret confab with the visiting army officers, Voropayev went out into the waiting room and there answered all the questions put to him as if he were an enquiry bureau.

A face, flushed from chattering, flashed before his eyes. It was Ogarnova's. Why she was here, goodness only knows.

"Alexei Vitaminich!" she called to him from a distance, waving her hand. "Bring us some sailors. Nice ones!"

"It wouldn't be wise to bring anybody to you," answered Voropayev contemptuously without looking in her direction and continuing his conversation.

She could not retreat—the snub had been administered too publicly. With a smile that pleaded for clemency, she asked:

"Why?"

"Why should we have to blush for you again, and before strangers too?" retorted Voropayev, turning away with an air of indifference.

Pausov and Serdyuk, who were standing near-by, laughed.

"Serves her right!... She's getting quite out of hand. Thanks, Colonel, for pulling her up a bit."

But Ogarnova, with an insolent expression of affected perplexity on her face, was already tripping up to Lenochka who, looking very tired, was pouring into white clay mugs the liquor of stewed dried pears, the beverage with which Korytov was entertaining the conference that evening.

"Is he as spiteful as that to you too?" enquired Ogarnova in a loud, bantering tone, as if wishing by this question to expose Voropayev before all the leading people of the district as having connection with the District Committee waitress.

Lena turned pale.

"Oh, no! He is very nice to us," she answered with affected pertness, lowering her eyes and hoping that this would be the end of it.

"I know how he is to us. I'm asking how he is to you!"

"To me he is always nicer than to anybody," retorted Lena with defiant simplicity and emphasis, looking straight and honestly at Ogarnova.

"I doubt it."

"If he were a bad man I wouldn't love him." And this was said so well that it was simply impossible to laugh at what she had said, or to insult her.

"Why didn't you invite me to the wedding?" said Ogarnova, still trying to keep the upper hand, but Lena, making no reply and not even glancing at her, picked up the tray and stepped briskly towards Korytov's office.

* * *

The people did not disperse for a long time. The forthcoming arrival of visitors from Moscow had set everybody agog. They crowded around talking until about eleven o'clock.

"Perhaps they'll conclude peace?" Yegorov asked for the hundredth time, scanning everybody's face with perplexed eyes.

Shirokogorov took Voropayev's arm and led him aside.

"Tell me quickly, Vitaminich, what's up? You must know."

Voropayev shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't."

"But why here? It's very nice, of course, but there is one thing I don't like about it:

we'll have foreign visitors coming to our wine cellar.... I don't like them, I must say!"

Everybody instinctively felt that he must take a part in the forthcoming developments and be responsible for them. That is why everybody looked so grave, braced up and excited.

Some wanted to post guards on the forest roads, although this had been done already without them; others resolved to exceed their normal rates of output at work, or else advised Lieutenant Colonel Rybalchenko to muster his fishermen immediately and put out to sea.

Rybalchenko agreed that it was necessary to put out to sea, although he did not anticipate a catch—a storm had been raging for three days—and vowed he would put out at dawn.

Stoiko, the chairman of the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz, convinced that Stalin would visit his kolkhoz any day, demanded that a program for the reception be drawn up.

"But listen, comrades," he shouted anxiously. "What do you have to do in a case like this? I mean it seriously. Well, suppose Comrade Stalin gets out of his car, I step up, salute and report. Then I lead him in. But

where to, I ask you? To my office? I have four chickens there. Or shall I take him to our accountant's house? It's a nice little place. Perhaps not take him anywhere, but show him round the farm straight away? What do you advise? I mean it seriously, comrades. It's an important question, you know!"

But nobody listened to him because every man was talking about what he himself was interested in.

There was something wonderfully fine in this general excitement. The people matured as a result of their contact with a great event which, strictly speaking, did not concern them. But is it true that it did not concern them? Were they not the ones who had called forth this event? World-famous men had assembled to decide the issue of the war which had been won by these very people who, excited and timid, were now crowding the rooms and corridors of the Party Committee headquarters.

Korytov was more nervous than all the rest.

"Well, what do you say to it? Aren't we lucky, aren't we lucky?" he enquired of Voropayev, for the dozenth time already, smiling frightenedly and guiltily as if convinced that

something unpleasant was sure to happen to him personally. "Well, we'll do all we can," he added, spreading his arms out helplessly and assuming a stern air, like a commander of a military unit about to embark on a dangerous operation. "What do you think, shouldn't we discuss this at kolkhoz meetings?"

"Discuss what?"

"What? . . . Oh, about exerting all our efforts, and so on, until the enemy is utterly routed. You think it is not worth while?"

But it was already known that a message had been received from Vasyutin, secretary of the Regional Committee, advising the people calmly to go on with their work and stating that the opening of the conference imposed no extra duties upon the local authorities.

About midnight Voropayev wanted to go home, but Lena was still washing up the cups and glasses and he decided to wait for her so that they could go together. From the distant clinking of glasses he guessed that Lena was hurrying, knowing that he was waiting for her, and this hurry pleased him.

"What are you sitting here for?" Korytov nervously asked him a number of times, peeping out of his office.

"I'm waiting for Lena."

"Oh! . . . Well, what do you say to it all?" he enquired again, forgetting that he had already done so a dozen times or more.

And again they talked about the forthcoming events. The conference was to open within the next few days.

At last, the sounds in the distant corner where the sideboard stood ceased.

"I am ready, Alexei Veniaminovich."

Voropayev got up.

"Well, until the morning!"

"Until the morning! Keep well! And don't be late, for God's sake! Don't let me down!"

The night was calm now. An amazing stillness reigned, the kind that comes with frost. Scattered flakes of snow fell, small, that tickled the face.

Lena held Voropayev's arm tightly, not allowing him to walk too fast. An onlooker might have thought that they were out for a stroll.

"Shall we see Stalin?" she enquired in a whisper, looking round.

"I think not. He'll be too busy."

"I suppose so. It won't be my luck to see him," she said sadly with a regretful sigh.

Sophia Ivanovna opened the door for them even before they knocked. She had not

been sleeping, and evidently she guessed that something important had happened, for she asked no questions.

* * *

Again Voropayev had much time for reflection.

With his overcoat collar turned up and his sheepskin hat drawn almost over his eyes, he sat for hours on the balcony of the District Committee headquarters. Four times a day Lena placed before him either a glass of tea, a cup of milk, or a glass of liquor from stewed dried fruit. One of the kolkhozes had sent three sacks of dried apples and pears, so everybody at the District Committee was now drinking this liquor from morning till night.

At first there was, indeed, little to do. But one day several foreign ships entered the port and animated groups of American and British sailors appeared on the esplanade, followed by admiring crowds of small boys. The visitors were in a jovial mood. Their presence in the fantastic land of Russia made them feel wondrous kind. They willingly allowed themselves to be photographed with the local inhabitants, especially with the feminine section, and

clapped their hands in admiration of the best-looking among them.

The esplanade soon became crowded. Some of the visitors, in going round to see the sights, at once took a fancy to the only restaurant in the town, fitted out in a former barber's shop. Russian cocktails—a blend of vodka and beer—roused universal admiration, for they knocked out even those who had never been floored before.

But the need for people who knew English did not arise until several scraps had occurred between the British and Americans in disputes over who had achieved greater military glory.

After pacifying with difficulty one group of sailors and promising on oath to come back and share a bottle of whiskey with them, Voropayev hobbled to another that was engaged in a dangerous discussion about Dunkirk, the honour of the flag and the allegation that the British most often fight with their tongues.

Voropayev was amazed by the precariousness of the friendship between the sailors of the two kindred Allied powers, and still more by the ease with which each side sought and found occasion to quarrel.

The onlooker gained the impression that this friendship was burdensome and almost offensive to both sides, and that it would be natural for them to feel that they were in different camps.

The British—even when making their acquaintance in the street—gave Voropayev the impression of being sincerely amazed to find that the world was inhabited by others besides themselves, and that these others were human.

Willingly admitting that the Russians are brave, the Norwegians pious, the Spaniards hotheaded and the Belgians prudent, they envied none, regarding themselves as superior to all.

The Americans created the impression of being jolly good fellows who hated only two nations—the Japanese and British.

Of these tiring duties, not of an interpreter so much as the representative of public order, Voropayev was suddenly relieved a few days later. It was definitely learned that Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill had arrived. There was talk about a small boy whom the British Prime Minister had presented with a cigar. An old sailor averred on oath that Churchill's real calling was that of a pugilist, and that he

had given up the boxing ring only before the war broke out. Several ladies appeared, to whom Roosevelt bowed and conversed with. All the good-looking male foreigners were suspected of being Edens.

The people talked a lot about Roosevelt.

He created a good impression upon those who saw him. The people like to see in great men the features of the zealot, for what, after all, is the measure of greatness if not zeal?

Churchill, with the inevitable cigar in his mouth, obese and senile-looking, but youthfully active and possessing amazing power of endurance, also created an impression, but not the same as that created by Roosevelt, far from it. The British Prime Minister was astonishing rather than likeable.

It was felt that the British Prime Minister was a tireless businessman consumed with anxiety lest he arrive too late and miss something supremely important likely to be going at any moment. His manner of peering into people's faces as if expecting that they must speak to him always raised a merry laugh, and his passion for jeeps in which he was visible to the people and from which he could bow to them with an air of

pleasure, also gave rise to animated comment.

He was the head of the Allied army, and for this alone the people wanted to respect him, but there was nothing likeable about him.

He gave the people the impression of an old gentleman who had lunched well and had washed his lunch down with some delicious and bracing beverage.

One evening Voropayev received a telephone call, requesting him to go at once to the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz where a tipsy American was going from house to house and questioning the kolkhozniks according to a most idiotic questionnaire. Very soon after a car arrived for him. Voropayev's desire to see his people from the *Pervomaisky* was so strong that he set out immediately without first reporting to the District Committee.

* * *

The American had been roaming around the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz since early morning, and by the time Voropayev arrived he was in that inhuman state in which only inveterate drunkards who have drunk up oceans of liquor can get into. Voropayev had been

almost certain that this was some poor wight who had wandered into the place, and could hardly believe it when on the visiting card he read the name of a famous journalist who was working for a world-famous newspaper.

Being of the opinion that the visitor and his interpreter, a former tsarist army officer, could not be left alone in their present state, Voropayev ordered them to be taken to bed at Ogarnova's house and he himself went to see the Podnebeskos.

Natasha was at home. Her now rounded body, full of inexpressible charm, must have seemed hideous to herself for she blushed as she greeted Voropayev. But the whole of her —her smile, her enormously distended abdomen and the paleness of her face wearied by pregnancy—was so touching that Voropayev gazed at her almost with the eyes of a lover.

They talked about Yuri who had gone to consult a famous professor, and about the favourable change in their circumstances, but they were interrupted by Styopka Ogarnov who came running in to say that the American had woke up and was drinking Riesling to clear his head, but they had not yet succeeded in bringing the interpreter round, although they had given him a draught.

Voropayev hurried off to the Ogarnovs "as fast as his crutches could take him."

Harris (for such was the American's name) proved to be a sprightly fellow. They took a liking to each other at once and had a long talk.

An hour later they started an argument about the possibility of an early peace and, as happens only between good acquaintances, the acerbity of their remarks and their extremely opposite points of view failed to cool their ardour.... They returned to town late in the evening and arranged to meet next day to conclude the argument. They met, but, as often happens, they did not settle the argument and arranged for a third session.

It began with the American wanting to know what, actually, was the Soviet system, and what were the Soviet people. They talked about national traits of character and about the destiny of nations and, in the end, began to argue about democracy.

"For God's sake, don't run away with the idea that you are a democracy," said Harris jocularly.

"Why not?"

"Because we have the monopoly of the best democracy going. There is no democ-

racy better than the American brand. I mean it seriously."

"Is that your own opinion, or your newspaper's?"

"My own, of course. What I want to do, quite disinterestedly, let me tell you, is to convince my readers that you are almost American, but I feel I can't do that."

"It would be wrong if you did, you understand that yourself."

"Perhaps. But we are studying the world and making comparisons. Of course, we Americans are a hundred percent democracy. Everything that resembles us, that approaches us, we respect and like, but everything that is remote from us we reject. Bear that in mind if you want us to like you."

"Why, then, are your people so unfriendly towards the English? One would think that there isn't another nation that is so eager to be like you, and yet. . . ."

"As regards the traditional England, there is nothing more unprincipled in the world, and we Americans don't respect her over much. Sometimes our dislike extends to the whole British nation."

"Let us assume that this is the explanation. But in that case, what have you in common

with the Chinese? If we are to speak of the souls of nations, then you and the Chinese are souls of different colours and different sizes."

The American laughed.

"You think we cannot dispense with the laws of capitalist development, struggle for markets, and so forth?"

"I do."

"You see, when I'm sober, I can't parry your thrusts so well. Take me somewhere where we can have a nice quiet drink. By the way, I'll get rid of my interpreter."

Voropayev decided to take the American to Shirokogorov.

* * *

As Voropayev had anticipated, the old man was very displeased with the American's visit.

But everything passed off very well. Shirokogorov could speak French, which Harris regarded as his second mother tongue, and Voropayev joined in the conversation, now in Russian and now in English.

The conversation turned to wine. Shirokogorov regretfully remarked that for a number of reasons this year's vintage, the Victory Vintage, would probably not be a good one.

"Do you think you'll achieve victory this year?" enquired Harris, pouncing upon this remark. "Tell me frankly."

Shirokogorov calmly assured him that this was his opinion and displayed no exceptional interest when he saw the American jotting something in his notebook.

"Yes, we would be able to achieve victory this year if you gentlemen did not hinder us," reiterated Shirokogorov suddenly with an unexpectedly grim smile.

"We?"—Harris looked into the old man's face like a hunting dog and, without turning his eyes away, kept writing in his notebook.

"You and the English."

"Now that's simply splendid. Why?"

"Because with you, something or other is always not yet ready. I am convinced that you are still in the stage of reverses and that you are unprepared for victory."

"Oh, that's splendid! And don't you think that you have a lot to do yet?"

The old man turned pale and, retorted bluntly:

"Less than what has been done already. We have pushed victory so near to you that you have only to reach out your hand for

it, but you are afraid that people will say that victory was given to you as a present. . . ."

"What is your opinion?"

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours."

"My personal opinion?"

"Yes, your personal opinion."

"I, Shirokogorov, think that the English have certainly received it as a present from us, but you, on your sector, have done more than the others, although much less than we have done, and that you would never achieve victory without us even if you sincerely desired victory. There. Put that down. It's my personal opinion, of course."

At this point, noticing how widely the old man's nostrils were distended, Voropayev turned the conversation as quickly as possible to the peaceful subject of wine.

Shirokogorov reluctantly conducted the visitors to the winetasting room that was furnished with tables and stools shaped like barrels. Svetlana Chirikova—Voropayev was amazed to see her there—placed on a table wineglasses that bulged at the bottom like a lamp glass. These were winetaster's glasses, from which it was inconvenient to drink at a gulp.

"Let us start with a dry wine."

Shirokogorov's voice sounded solemn.

Svetlana poured a greenish-golden wine into the glasses. The old man raised his glass to his nose, sniffed several times, wrinkled his nose and jerked his head back as if he had taken a strong sniff of smelling salts.

"This brand of grape has not always been properly used in our country," he said regretfully, forgetting all else around him. "Riesling is a typical German wine and is really good only on the Rhine, but I think that for its fine flavour, our Riesling made from Alcadar, is inimitable. What's your opinion?"

Harris emptied his glass, throwing his head back like a rooster because these special glasses were made not for drinking but for slow sipping. Strictly speaking, winetasters do not drink but chew wine.

Looking guiltily at his empty glass, Harris signed to Svetlana to fill it again. The girl blushed and turned her head away, pretending not to have understood the signs.

"Look at its morning, almost subdued shade," said Shirokogorov, admiringly twirling his glass.

"Pour me out another glass, Miss," said Harris emphatically. "Owing to inexperience I didn't notice any shades in the first one."

When they tried an Aligoté, Harris checked himself and talked about its greenish shade, but this was nonsense, because the Aligoté had no shades.

The old man frowned and began to accelerate the winetasting ceremony.

"This is a red table wine, a blend made from Cabernet, Malbeck, Grenache and Mourvède. It's a sturdy, practical wine without any special fineness."

Harris livened up at the word "sturdy" and again emptied his glass before he thought of smelling its contents and holding it up to the light.

"Humph! So it is," he said with embarrassment, sniffing at the empty glass. "I would say it has a kick in it."

"Yes, it quickly, and even somewhat roughly, enters into communion with a man," remarked Shirokogorov.

"Even roughly?" retorted Harris, ready to take up the cudgels on behalf of the practical wine, "I wouldn't say so. If you drank a whole bottle perhaps. Otherwise, it's a gentle wine."

He obviously wanted another glass of this practical wine, but Shirokogorov began to talk about Madeira.

"Now here is a bright wine! It is charming. We, I must tell you, specialize in strong and dessert wines. The dry climate and intense heat give us sweet and fragrant grapes of rich potentiality. Speaking figuratively, our grapes like to be converted into good wine.... Look at its amber-golden colour. Old amber, what? This is from the Portuguese varieties of Cercial and Verdeliot with the addition of Malvasia and Albillo. What a fine, well-blended bouquet, what harmony of colours!... It is a very bright wine, talented, has a brilliant exterior. And do you know what's pleasant?" he asked turning to Voropayev, "it is improving year after year, here. Have you ever tried our red Port made from Cabernet, Alexei Veniaminovich? In its native land the Cabernet produces the best Bordeaux table wine in the world, and we make Port wine out of it in no way inferior to the best Portuguese brands. I would call it Pomegranate Port. Melted ruby! And the flavour! Full, strong, and the finest bouquet."

Harris, jotting something in his book, nodded.

"And this is our Pinot-gris. The French, as you must know, in coupage with other Pinot, obtain from it either Champagne or

a light, fine, table wine. But for some reason our Champagne drinkers don't like it particularly and so, you know, we decided to make a dessert wine out of Pinot-gris. Debating with the French, as it were. And we have succeeded. We have obtained, as you may now observe, a magnificent, very original, noble wine, the colour of strong tea, full body, and nutty flavour."

"A beautiful wine!" said Harris approvingly. "A splendid wine!"

"What about the bouquet! It's like the smell of the crust of rye bread, strong, and long-remembered."

"Don't you think, Professor, that wine ought to smell like wine and not like something else? I can't understand why wine should smell like bread."

"What is the smell of wine?" Shirokogorov answered by putting another question. But seeing that Harris was not inclined to continue the discussion he signed to Svetlana to remove the glasses from the table.

"We will now try our crown wine—Muscat. It's the leader among our wines."

Svetlana brought in a tray with four glasses that gleamed golden in the light. Shirokogorov was the first to pick up his

glass and raise it gently to his nose as if it were a flower.

"I ask you, can you smell the honeylike fragrance of meadows, or not?"

"Not quite," answered Harris, somewhat embarrassed. "At any rate, not of meadows, Doctor."

"In that case, gulp it down to empty the glass. My friend, you ought to drink boot polish diluted with alcohol," he added in a seemingly jocular tone.

Harris laughed.

"I ought to drink undiluted alcohol, Professor. As for the meadows, I can picture them in my imagination. What do I want the smell of meadows for when I am drinking wine? That's an original idea. Purely Russian."

"In our dictionary we have the word 'inspiration.' Well, the wines that I make exist in order to inspire people. They smell of associations, of life. The wine which you have poured down your throat, I must observe, is usually taken in small sips. It creeps to your spinal cord like the memory of wanderings and travels, of golden meadows on lofty mountains, and you grow young if you are old. Your chest breathes with such tremendous breadth, your eyes

see such vistas, that everything difficult seems easy, the distant near. It seems to me that, speaking poetically, this wine is the soul of the shepherd of the hills. The mountain slopes thickly covered with vines, far down below—the sea.... Sultry heat, stillness, vast spaces, but he, leaning on his crook, is singing in a low voice of the battles fought by his forefathers. But pardon me, please, for this inappropriate lyrical digression.... To proceed.... This is another brand of our white Muscat. It is the neighbour of the first. They are separated by a matter of twenty kilometres along the coast, but smell it. This second one, for some reason, has the most tender fragrance of the citron. Where did it come from? I cannot tell. No citrous fruit grows here, as you know. Moreover, our wines have no foreign admixtures. Probably, we shall never know the origin of this strange smell.

"It is the smell of ocean liners. It is the smell of travel, of discovery. It seems to me that this second Muscat is the soul of the seaman who has crossed all the oceans, has experienced all the storms and, in his old age, is sitting at the door of his cottage telling of his voyages. Well ... here before you is

the rose Muscat. It differs from the first two only in its bouquet, and in the very strange and also so far unexplained feature that it has the scent of roses, although, mark you, not every season. The scent of roses appears to accompany it in special years. This wine is very beautiful, feminine. Have you heard the ancient fable about the nightingale that was in love with a rose? If I were a poet, or a fabulist, I would certainly write a fable about the vine that was in love with a rose."

"This is simply wonderful!" exclaimed Harris. "Sentimental, like in America. But tell me, Doctor, how can you spend time on all this harmonious nonsense when your country is in ruins?" he enquired, slipping his notebook into his pocket.

"I am preparing for it an elixir of triumph, my friend; wines of victory, wines of repose and comfort. You can't live only for today because, most often, today is the incompleted yesterday. The true present always lies in the future."

Without waiting for an invitation, Harris almost filled a glass with Muscat and then added some Madeira.

Shirokogorov shook his head disapprovingly.

"I can never understand people who drink cocktails. The only people capable of drinking in that indiscriminate way..."

"...are the English and Americans, I know! Who are in advance of all? The Russians! Who eat the best food? The Russians! Who have the nicest drinks? The Russians! I have heard all this before, you know, and I know what such statements are worth."

"You see, Mr. Harris, it's not a matter of who eats the best food, perhaps our food is inferior to yours, but we have long deserved a better life for the great deal we have done. You won't put that down in your notebook? That's a great pity."

"The soul of your local wines is not as pugnacious as yours, Professor."

"That is very much to be regretted. We shall still need pugnacity."

"What for? You intend to finish the war this year, and, I suppose, fascism will be crushed...."

"German fascism—yes. But you, Mr. Harris, will step into the place of the vanquished, you will become the fiercest champion of capitalism in its worst forms. And there are many like you."

"Why me?" Harris took his notebook out again. "This is wonderful! Do you think that Roosevelt too may some day become a champion of fascism?"

"Why a champion of fascism? He may come over to our side."

"Oh! Is that so! But why—this is my last question—do you prophesy this for America? Do not fascist qualities suit England better?"

"Churchill's England is your kept woman. That lady of very respectable age has taken the risk of tying her fate with a young Lovelace, promising to leave him a big legacy if he loves her while she lives."

"Well, that's all! I shall make more money on you today than I have made for a long time, Professor. Good-bye and thanks a lot." And Harris laughed a grim laugh.

"To say that England is our kept woman!..." he mumbled as he got into the car. "You heard that, of course."

"In my opinion, the old man is so utterly right that it is uninteresting to talk about it. There are two Englands—one of them is your kept woman."

"We are not rich enough to keep England."

"But neither is England rich enough to yield herself to you for nothing."

Voropayev told the driver to turn on to the mountain road to Merezhkova's children's sanatorium.

* * *

The children were having dinner.

Voropayev conducted the visitor to the "philosophers'" room where all were present except Zina, but she came running in when she heard of the American's arrival and, as always, at once began to introduce herself and her roommates.

Shura Naidenov kept his eyes on the book he was reading, turning the pages over with a stick with a rough rubber tip that he held between his teeth.

"This is inhuman," said Harris in a whisper, although, probably, he had no suspicion that any of the children could understand English.

"What is inhuman?"

"It is inhuman to compel this unfortunate creature to go on living. You understand what I mean."

"Do you think that because you have a pair of hands and a pair of legs, you are

happier than he is? And that it is more humane to let you live? Did I understand you right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"I don't agree."

But Harris was obdurate.

"Then tell me, for what experiments is this child being kept alive?" he asked Voropayev. "Are you so sure that he is a coming genius?"

"He may be, but I do not insist that he is."

"Then what do you expect to rear him into?"

"A man. But why not ask him. That boy speaks a little English."

Not even glancing at Naidenov, who continued reading his book, Harris walked out of the room and without a word of farewell to anybody made for the car.

They returned by the lower road that ran along the shore.

The driver asked Voropayev:

"He didn't like what he saw up there, eh?"

"He didn't."

"It was not winetasting."

The road wound through vineyards, which looked sad and forlorn at this time of the year.

The bare vines twisted upward on the slopes in grey curls, and one could scarcely believe that they would don festive leaves and look picturesque in the summer.

The shacks in which the watchwomen sat in the autumn were also deserted and not a living being did they pass on the way, as if they were driving through uninhabited country.

The driver suddenly pulled up at a disused roadside well and turned round to Voropayev.

"Comrade Colonel, tell him that into this well the Germans threw my brother-in-law's two children."

Voropayev translated this for Harris. The latter made no comment.

"I myself went down when I came back from the partisans and identified them. It was awful! Too awful to remember. One of the kiddies, the younger one, a boy of seven, only had his legs and a rib broken. Evidently he died of hunger, but, the older one, he was thirteen, his head . . . you could guess. . . ."

Harris' lips turned pale.

"There are things that ought not to be spoken about aloud," he said.

"Then we'd have to keep quiet too often."

They said no more until they reached town.

...The next conversation between Voropayev and Harris took place on the esplanade.

Harris asserted that the Russians disliked the Americans, and Voropayev explained to him that it was not a matter of like or dislike, but on the whole our people did like the Americans.

"Will you not explain to me why the richest capitalist country is pursuing the policy of a degenerate country? You will not deny, Harris, that in this war England has lost all the advantages she previously enjoyed and that victory will not bring her anything good."

"Yes, I believe you are right."

"Nor will you deny that many of your people want to grab all the fruits of victory."

"No, in this you... no, no, in this you are wrong."

"But I tell you that your bankers have but one aim: to convert America into a stronghold of militarism, and Churchill will thank heaven that he had managed in time to make such good militarists of them. Churchill is their god, not Roosevelt. Roose-

velt is too good for them. They have long deserved a worse President, Harris."

"May I write to you sometimes, Voropayev?" Harris asked suddenly.

"What for? If you undergo any change, I shall hear about it without your letters. If you remain what you are now, what will be the use of your letters?"

"Perhaps you are right."

They parted, although they would very much have liked to talk some more.

His conversations with Harris had so upset Voropayev that he gladly took the first opportunity to decline further meetings with the visitors.

* * *

Nevertheless, he had occasion to meet Harris once again. The foreign journalists were going on an excursion to Sevastopol and Voropayev's services were needed again....

Vasyutin, just arrived from the Regional Committee, personally came to see him and begged him to go with this excursion, as a personal favour to himself, as he emphasized several times.

Voropayev had not met Vasyutin before and it pleased him that the latter had come

to him in this simple way and was not playing the high and mighty official. Moreover, Vasyutin's outward appearance at once created a favourable impression.

He was broad-shouldered and stout with a thatch of wavy, fair hair and a charming smile in both cheeks which always lent a flush to his pleased face.

"I have already told Korytov not to pile too much work on you, but whom else can we ask if not you? We have nobody. And I want to give you another little assignment while you are on this job. On a local matter."

"But Comrade Vasyutin, I haven't been here very long. I'm not an old inhabitant."

"If you are not, you will be. You don't intend to go away soon, do you? Have you fixed yourself up a little yet?"

"More or less."

"Less rather than more, from what I've heard. Never mind, it will all come right."

In outward appearance, Vasyutin was a typical Party leader, active but not fussy, and resolute and emphatic in his gestures. He was that, not so much from his personal character as from habit, acquired during his many years of service as a commander who never delayed and was never late.

Vasyutin took action the moment a problem rose before him. He put off only that which was definitely on the road to success or was definitely hopeless. On the Communists in the region he must have created the impression of being tenacious, stubborn and sarcastic. Voropayev knew from the many opinions he had heard about him that Vasyutin was respected for his simplicity, for his ability to harness himself to new tasks and chiefly, for his very conspicuous ability to remember the names, patronymics and surnames of the many thousands of people who constituted the regional Active.

While Voropayev, hobbling about on his crutches—he never wore his artificial leg at home—was getting ready and combing his hair in front of the mirror, Vasyutin stood looking out of the window and impatiently tapping his open notebook with his pencil.

"I have heard, Comrade Voropayev, that you have somewhat underrated your strength, or let's put it this way—overrated your sickness. You have retired too early," he said, gazing into the street.

"Perhaps I have retired too early, but, as the saying goes, one doesn't ask for wounds and sickness, one gets them."

"Oh, I understand that. I am not blaming, I'm regretting."

"Ah! Thanks for your consideration."

"Incidentally, don't growl too much at us people in the rear. We have seen all sorts of people from the front. Not every man from the front is a front-ranker. Epaulets and decorations don't hypnotize us, Comrade Voropayev, and I don't think they ought to hypnotize you."

Voropayev waited to hear what would come next.

"I don't mean you. As regards yourself, the opinions I hear about you are not bad, not bad," added Vasyutin.

"The typical appraisal of a bureaucrat," Voropayev reflected. "It would be wrong to say 'bad,' but he's afraid to say 'good,'" and as this part of the conversation was displeasing to him he sat down at the table, saying:

"I'm ready. I am listening, Comrade Vasyutin."

The visitor cast a side glance at him and, with a flourish, drilled a "full stop" in his notebook.

"Yes. Well, I'll start from what is really the end. Yesterday Comrade Stalin re-

turned from the conference to his quarters on foot. Evidently he was tired and wanted to have a stretch. He went by the lower road. Do you know it? And he drew attention to the numerous vacant spaces on the slopes. 'Why is this,' he asked. I said: 'Scarcity of water, Joseph Vissarionovich. Unsuitable for tobacco, too high for vines, so they've been left for olives. A useful crop, and doesn't need water.' He answered: 'But I don't see any olives. Where are they?' he says."

"He was right! Where are they?"

"Of course he was right! I confess we've been thinking about that ourselves, but we've never been able to get down to it. These damned current questions take up all our time. Well, then, I'll ask you to go with these visitors and when you are pointing out the scenery to them cast your eye around and size the place up—where, how much, and how? Later on, of course, we'll appoint a special commission. . . ."

Voropayev waved his hand derisively.

"A sheer waste of money. I believe in the Ferghana method. Commissions were set up there, but the kolkhozniks kept treading on their heels with their mattocks."

"That was a brilliant experiment, I'll admit," said Vasyutin in a tone of envy. "But I'm afraid. Times are different now. But when did they start in Ferghana? Note that. In nineteen thirty-nine. What a year that was, do you remember? They started that job not because of poverty, but from exuberance of strength.... Exuberance, that's the word! They were simply bubbling over with it! Isn't that so? But what can we dream of when all the people are away at the war and we here can only rally one another? Yes, well. Look round and give free play to your imagination. Sometimes I think we ought to have special dreamers, the same as we have propagandists and agitators."

"They'll be put on a salary and stop dreaming!"

"That's true, too."

"Supposing we go together, Comrade Vasyutin!" Voropayev proposed on the spur of the moment. He liked this impatient man. "I will go with you to the pass, stay the night with the meteorologist and at dawn I will join the foreign journalists' excursion."

"Stay the night with Zarubin? That idle fellow who holds conversation with the wind?" Vasyutin scratched his temple with

his pencil, screwed up his eyes and calculated whether he could spare the time, and suddenly consented.

Beyond the town the road made a steep ascent and at the spot where on the first morning of his arrival Voropayev had dreamed of having a house of his own Vasyutin's jeep casually came to a stop.

The steep crag, bordered with narrow vacant plots, gave cause for reflection.

"Just the place for the sovkhoz offices. Near to town, highroad close by, wharf within arm's reach," at once suggested Vasyutin and asked Voropayev for his opinion.

"I once dreamed of building myself a little house here," the latter answered laughing.

"You wouldn't have been able to manage it."

"No."

"It's always harder to build a small one than a big one."

"Perhaps. But as you say, this is just the place for the offices. Do you know, I feel I'd like to become a director of building operations here, the place is still so unpopulated and uncultivated."

"Here, have a bite," said Vasyutin, taking a packet from his pocket and offering Voropayev a sandwich.

"Thanks. And look! There must be water here? Do you see the bed of the stream over there? A small reservoir, and. . . ."

"You are right. If only we had the people."

"The war, I hope I'm not putting it crudely, has rendered us a good service by showing what can be achieved if the entire people put their backs into the task. . . ."

"In fifteen years' time a wonderful health resort will have sprung up here."

"You are right. Will have sprung up. That's just the way to put it. And that's how things come about in our country, they grow, as it were."

"And now let's move on to that little bay over there."

"I have already named it 'Happy Bay.' A wonderful place. All pine, do you see? And how thick! The air there is like liquor, 'pon my word. On the beach you smell the brine and in the water you get the smell of pine. A local doctor here once read me a whole lecture on the importance of sea water for the maintenance of health. He said

that, being a saline solution, it is an electrolyte, and the human body is also an electrolyte. Well, when the two come into mutual contact an electric current is caused and an exchange of ions takes place. The ions of the salts that exist in solution in the sea water penetrate the body, and the latter excretes all sorts of poisonous substances into the water."

"Hell, I never thought sea-bathing was such a scientific operation! You seem to be well up on the subject, though!"

"What did you think?"

"Very well, then. You have convinced me. We've got to start building in Happy Bay. Take it up. One good man put on the job is half the job done," said Vasyutin in passing, as it were.

The jeep raced them off to Happy Bay. In the distance, on the other side of the town, gleamed the bronze forehead of Eagle Peak.

"A pity we haven't the time to visit Eagle Peak too," said Voropayev.

"When you begin to build I shall visit you there as well. All right? I don't want to press you, I'm just speaking in a friendly, Bolshevik way. It was not for nothing that

they pointed you out to me. Get into harness. You've had quite enough of scratching your head at lectures."

Voropayev at once caught Vasyutin's favourite expression. He liked that "get into harness." It was not like Korytov's "enthuse."

Vasyutin was sitting with the driver. Sitting in the back seat, Voropayev leaned forward, and catching the secretary's face in the mirror on the windscreen he gave him a sly wink and said:

"I have a theory, Comrade Vasyutin!"

"Who hasn't?"

"Yes, but listen. After this frightful war we must take a leap forward that will make the prewar level look silly. Am I right?"

"Supposing, although the word 'silly' is out of place here. Well, go on!"

"To be able to take this leap, we must, in my opinion, do the following: You remember how, in the past, we pulled people out of villages and factories upwards, into the capital, into the People's Commissariats? Well, now we must with the same energy and consistency send the cadres that have been trained at the top down again. . . ."

". . . To go among the people?" Vasyutin interjected with a touch of sarcasm.

"Yes, among the people. People's Commissars to be sent to the regions, Vice-People's Commissars to the districts, Colonels to the District Army Commissariats, Brigade Engineers to be made road foremen."

"M-m, yes. I'm afraid I've troubled you too early. Very well, keep where you are for the time being. I'm short of people as it is and he comes along with his theories."

"Don't growl. I'll suggest people to you, and good people too."

"Do you want to tell me I don't know what people I have? That's going a bit too far.... You want me to take you to Zarubin's place, don't you? He's another one with theories. He sent me a memorandum proposing that a home for composers be erected on the mountain ridge. There's lots of music there, he says, and it's going to waste. Lives as if in Paradise, the sonofabitch, and gives us no rest!"

"What? Do you want to go down too, Comrade Vasyutin?"

The latter shrugged his shoulders but made no reply. He was irritated by the unfortunate turn the conversation had taken and the interest with which he had just been scanning the foothills died out.

It was only after a prolonged silence, when they had almost reached the pass, that he said, in taking leave of Voropayev:

"Your lectures... of course, they rouse and organize the people... but in times like these you've got to pull. Once you've taken hold of the shafts you've got to pull and pull as long as you've strength in your body. That's my theory!"

"Get into harness?" Voropayev enquired.

"That's it! It's not the one that runs ahead that's the front-ranker, it's the one who carries others with him."

"That's exactly what I'm saying. The people with experience and broad outlook should now be on the most difficult jobs."

"Do you call yours a difficult job? You ought to be in mine! It gets so hot, let me tell you...."

The meteorological station was about three hundred metres away, but Voropayev proceeded unhurriedly, thinking, examining himself as he went.

After all, he was right. The heart grows young, imbibes fresh strength and hope when you are on something new. That's what Voropayev needed. And besides—who said that it was particularly easy here, right on the

land, where new human shoots are springing up. "I'll go into harness, but not where Vasyutin, but where the Podnebeskos, and Annushka Stupina need me. That's where I'll go into harness."

* * *

At dawn he got into the motorbus with the foreign journalists.

The weather was splendid for the time of the year. The foothills that ran steeply down to the sea glistened with thick, luscious dew. It trickled from the bare rock in small streams like rain stealthily creeping down the sloping ground instead of falling from the sky. The sad and tender smell of winter, the smell of sea rock and dank but not yet decayed leaves—a very edible smell, like dough—filled the air without merging with the smell of the sea that was quite near. At midday the heated rocks and adobe walls of the cottages also inopportunely pervaded the smell of hot bread.

The motorbus raced past a lone grave by the roadside and next to it towered the remains of an English tank. Those damned tanks had burned terrifically. The slightest touch, and they flared like candles. This one

must have belonged to Chernykh's Brigade. It had passed this spot. Those Siberians had first seen spring on the Black Sea coast in its most joyous, most festive month—May. That is at the very beginning, when the trees bloom before they have turned green. The long branches of the Judas trees were thickly covered with tiny blossoms and looked like huge sticks of violet coral. The peach and almond trees shone pink as if they were illuminated inside. Filled with the rolled petals of wind-blown blossoms, the fissures in the rocks blazed red and pink and sometimes blue. Camouflaged with plum and almond tree branches in bloom, the tanks had raced past like clumps of garden, and bunches of mountain tulips peeped from their slits. When the dead were buried it was not necessary to go far for flowers. Many indeed, were killed with flowers in their hands.

"Like the Riviera," said Ralph, the correspondent of a London newspaper, "or a little like Italy," he added, as if he had not heard a word of Voropayev's story about the tankists.

"Was there any fighting in the Riviera?" Voropayev asked, but the claxon screeched just then and he got no reply. At this mo-

ment the bus was driving round the sharpest curve in the pass.

When the sea was hidden from view and the sleepily reclining mountains stretched before them—a sad and monotonous landscape—a Frenchman who had been dozing up till now enquired:

"Has Stalin been to Sevastopol already? They say that Churchill and Roosevelt are going there today?"

"I don't know," answered Voropayev. "I would not allow anybody to go there for the time being."

The Englishman observed politely:

"Naturally. Historical monuments always want a little touching up."

"Sevastopol is not Dunkirk," retorted Voropayev. "But I would not allow even you to go to Sevastopol just now because the place is still thick with mines."

"I want to tell you, Mr. Guide, that we will go wherever we want to, and only to the places we want to. Still, I vote we stop for breakfast."

Everybody else solemnly voted for a halt. They cared as much about Sevastopol as they cared about last year's snow.

* * *

When breakfast was over, Harris said:

"Our dear, but stern, Colonel will be very surprised to hear that I came to the top as a journalist thanks to Russia."

Voropayev sat down sideways to the speaker. Last year, Provalov's Division had passed the spot where the foreign visitors were sipping Cognac, and many reminiscences arose in his mind.

Meanwhile, Harris went on to relate that in 1909, when he was young tourist in Paris, the Russian season opened at the Théâtre Châtelet. This presented a splendid opportunity to make the acquaintance of people you knew nothing about. Harris managed to get a ticket for *Prince Igor*, heard Shalyapin, and saw Nizhinsky and Karsavina dance, and also Fokin in a Polovetsky mass dance.

"Now you see what happened, gentlemen? *Prince Igor* is an opera. Rather heavy, like everything Russian, but melodious. And, of course, Shalyapin is a magnificent singer, and Nizhinsky the king of the ballet. But success was due not to the solo vocalists and dancers, but to the mass dancing. That is what gave insight into the Russian soul. Passion, ferocity and self-oblivion!... I say self-oblivion advisedly. That word expresses a state of soul

characteristic only of the Russian. Oblivion to oneself, to one's needs."

Harris glanced at Voropayev.

"I hope I am not wrong in my interpretation of the word 'self-oblivion,' my dear Colonel?"

"Frankly, I cannot say. I am not a linguist."

"Ah! That's one point to me. I thought you knew everything. Well, to return to my story. Had it been possible to take that opera for the screen, we Americans would have learned what the Russians were like ten years earlier. I nearly went crazy at the time. A horde of Polovtsy burst onto the stage like dancing flames, cracking their whips and brandishing their scimitars, howling, groaning, shouting, whirling faster and faster, and threatening. It was such a fantastic scene that the people in the front seats were simply scared. I then said to myself: Russian art, with tremendous strain, is restraining the passion of its people for a tremendous leap forward. What colour, what rhythm, what an impulse to leap somewhere into the fourth dimension!

"I thought to myself: God forbid that this self-oblivious passion should break beyond the

bounds of art. And the first newspaper article I wrote was about the Russian ballet."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Frenchman tactfully, getting ready to go.

"We still have time," said the Englishman, restraining him. "Harris can go on talking until we have finished this Cognac."

"Yes, the ballet is a fine thing. But at that time even foxy Briand, who applauded the Russian ballet girls, could not foresee the terrific speed of the Russian leap into the unknown. I tell you, Monsieur le Colonel, I sometimes regret that Russia entered politics."

"The ballet, of course, like every art, expresses the soul of a people, but to study a country from the ballet is like studying fruit-growing by eating jam," said Voropayev. He did not feel inclined to enter into a serious argument with Harris. He was sure that he would not succeed in altering his views. "You could have learnt much more about Russia without leaving home by reading Tolstoy, Chekhov and Maxim Gorky, not to speak of Lenin," he added, restraining his ire with difficulty.

Harris listened to what he said and then went on to relate what the famous Maurice Denis had told him about the decorations of

Bakst and Benois, and Voropayev glanced at his watch. At about this hour and on this day, the divisions of the Special Maritime Army had last year burst into the Balaklava Valley and in the distance, on the horizon, had seen the monument erected to the memory of the Italians who had perished there in 1855. The ascent of Sapun Hill, Sevastopol's Golgotha, then began.

If life could for an instant reproduce the scene that was enacted her—no, not even the scene but the mere sounds of it, the terrible roar of battle—the American's tongue would have cleaved to the roof of his mouth and his heart, impregnated with alcohol and scepticism, would have stopped beating forever at the sounds of what he called "self-oblivion," of the elemental, raging battle the Russians had fought here.

The divisions had crept on shoulder to shoulder like locusts.... They had moved on so fast that the command points could not keep up with them, and indeed it had seemed as if there were no command points, for it is easy to direct a battle when every man understands its objective.

This had been a privates', a people's battle, the opening and finish of which every

man had known beforehand. Only one thing had not been clear: whether it would last a day, a week or a month. But however long it lasted, it could end only in one way—with the liberation of Sevastopol.

White, limestone dust hung over the valley and the slopes of Sapun Hill and kept falling like fine, stony rain. He recalled how about a dozen infantry and artillerymen, harnessing themselves to a gun, had hauled it up the steep slope of the hill at a running pace. They had thrown off their tunics, sweat was pouring down their faces, but they ran, hauling the gun and shouting something at the top of their voices. The gun had ascended rather quickly, and when any of the men fell, their places were immediately taken by others. Behind the gun other men had run, carrying ammunition in their arms as mothers carry their infants, and when one of them fell it was a double loss—a man and a shell.

"What are you yelling for, boys?" Voropayev had asked them, feeling sorry for the way they were gasping for breath.

"This is Krikun Hill today, Comrade Colonel," a young artilleryman had answered. "From that side, the Germans', it's Sapun

Hill, but by tonight we'll make it Khripun Hill for them."*

It had taken nine hours of continuous assault to make the Germans feel the effects of Khripun Hill. That was where true self-oblivion had been displayed.

Meanwhile, Harris went on talking:

"That's exactly what Denis told me: 'I will come to the show with my little étude. It is the most magical mirage that could ever have appeared to an artist.' "

"Yes, the people liked gorgeous colours in those days," the Frenchman agreed, thinking that it was time to go. There was no more Cognac.

At last Harris allowed the Frenchman to get up and got up himself.

"Strange that you should have found the reflection of the Russian soul in the ballet," said Voropayev with an ironic smile. "That's all you know about it. I wonder what you would have said had you been in Moscow four years before that, on the barricades in nineteen hundred and five? Or if you had been familiar with the works of Pavlov and

* A play on the word Sapun. "Krikun" means "shouter," "Khripun" means one who has the death rattle in his throat.—*Tr.*

Sechenov? It seems to me that the storming of Sapun Hill, which we are now approaching, could give you a deeper insight into the Russian soul. Or Stalingrad, say. Don't you think so?"

Harris shrugged his shoulders.

The Englishman, glancing into a small handbook, enquired:

"What did you say, Sapun Hill?"

"Yes, Sapun Hill. I think it would be worth while having a look at the graveyard of the Allies of 1855, don't you?"

The polite Frenchman, who found the bickering between Harris and Voropayev awfully unpleasant and deemed it his duty to placate them, said:

"I would put it this way, Messieurs. Monuments! We are inspecting only monuments —there is some system in that. Otherwise, if we enter into a deep analysis of the events that have taken place here.... What do you think?"

"Quite right," the Englishman agreed. "Monuments—at least there is some system in that. What's your opinion?"

Harris said:

"It's important for me to take a dozen or so snapshots in the city to show my editor

that I have been here. Are there any monuments there?"

"Not yet, but the entire city is a monument."

"Now listen to him!" exclaimed Harris, livening up. "Just like a Bolshevik. There is not even a sign of any monuments there, but he floors the question with a tour de tête and says: the entire city is one huge monument. Oh those dialectics! Still, I vote with the majority."

And the motorbus turned in the direction of the old English Cemetery of 1855.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

CHAPTER SEVEN

As was always the case after a storm, the day was calm and still, with a tender, almost unawakened light, soft outline of rocks and clear and distinct horizon.

Voropayev was standing on the Graff Wharf surrounded by a crowd of tipsy American sailors who were staring at him as if he were a museum exhibit. They fingered his Medals, tapped his chest as if it were the window of an enquiry bureau, and asked him whether he had been in Stalingrad, Sevastopol, Kiev, Rumania, Hungary, Venice and Leningrad. They wanted to know whether he was a Ukrainian or an Uzbek, or if a Russian whether by birth or registration, whether he possessed any property, was he married, did he have children, and if so, how many?

They photographed him alone and among a group of themselves, and he had already presented his new friends with all that he

had on him—a duralumin cigarette case made by an amateur craftsman in the Black Sea Fleet, a cigarette lighter made from an empty cartridge, and a penknife with a coloured plastics handle; and he, in turn, had received about half a dozen fountain pens, half of a dollar bill with somebody's autograph, a wonderful illuminating pencil with a tiny bulb inside its isinglass case and about fifteen photographs with invitations to visit America.

An open car passed by very slowly. Several Soviet army officers who were in it looked curiously at Voropayev.

"Is that Stalin?" enquired a number of voices.

"Oh, no."

A very familiar figure in a General's greatcoat and tall sheepskin hat got up from his seat. A Lieutenant General whom he felt sure he had met before got out of the car and stepped towards Voropayev with outstretched arms.

"Don't you recognize me? I could see Voropayev being mobbed like a dog at a fair, so I decided to go to his assistance. . . ."

"Roman Ilyich! . . . What fates have brought you here?"

"How do, how do, Alexei Veniaminich!"

They embraced and kissed.

"Say good-bye to our Allies and take a seat in my car."

The sailors stepped aside, saluting. General Romanenko took Voropayev by the arm, looked him up and down with one rapid glance and, evidently displeased with the result of his examination, stepped towards the car, saying:

"Not what I expected, not a bit.... What, have you run away from the army?"

They began to converse as if they had never parted.

"I'd like to take a ride through the city if I may, Roman Ilyich."

"Certainly! Recollections, what?"

"Yes...."

"Well, recollect with your eyes, but keep talking to me. How is it you got stuck as a Colonel?" he continued. "I've been looking for you with all my eyes, searching for you in the Supreme Commander's Orders of the Day, thinking you were at least a Colonel General by now. What the devil took you to the provinces? And what about the Academy? I remember you wanted to write a book. Or were all these merely noble impulses, eh?"

Romanenko had formerly lectured on tactics and when he went to the front he was at once put on Staff work. He came under the notice of intelligent field Commanders and received rapid promotion. He was already Chief of Staff of an army when he was called to the General Staff in Moscow, where he was entrusted with new and interesting work which opened up the widest prospects. He delicately hinted to Voropayev that he would be happy to have his collaboration in this work—they had started in the war together as Lieutenant Colonels. The hint had been very gentle, but Voropayev felt that there was something offensively condescending about it. He at once noticed how shabby his greatcoat looked beside Romanenko's, how old was the one boot he wore, and how clumsy the artificial leg the kolkhoz has presented him with.

"I'm finished with the Academy. As for writing, I can do that here. Why am I finished? My health, my health, Roman Ilyich. And besides, the land has always had an attraction for me, you know kolkhoz life . . . that's something I know absolutely nothing about. . . ."

He began to relate his misadventures in the kolkhozes. Romanenko laughed and raised his hands with glee.

They drove slowly through the deserted, devastated streets, past the ruins of houses with the daylight showing through the shattered window frames. Neither the sound of music nor of children's laughter, neither the barking of dogs, nor the trilling of bicycle bells was heard. Here and there a solitary pedestrian hurried across a deserted street from which came only the sinister scraping of torn sheet-iron roofs and the annoying creak of half-broken rain pipes or shop signs. Our and Allies' ships were the only touch of life in the bay.

Lenin Street, however, at the end nearer to Graff Wharf, was fairly animated; and from South Bay now came rattling sounds like machine-gun bursts, the ceaseless clanging of hammers and the rattle of electric drills.

"It was from over there, North Side, I remember, that the men of the Second Guards Army broke through to here, to Graff Wharf. They crossed on empty barrels, and on coffins which they had obtained from some German undertaker. Later, whole flotillas of these coffins floated on the waves along the shore, to the astonishment of the inhabitants."

"Were you with the Second Guards?"

"With the Special Maritime, between Sapun Hill and the sea."

"Who was between you? I have forgotten."

"Kreiser, with the Fifty-First."

"Why, of course! I was nearly appointed to serve under him just before the assault. Shall we go on?"

On a hill on the outskirts, to the right of Laboratory Ravine, a tank was already mounted on a plinth. It was the first tank that had charged into the city. Voropayev vividly recalled the faces of its crew. Here the forward dressing station had found shelter. That's where Skripkin died. A little further on Yelansky was blown to bits.

It was sad to see the battlefield deserted and voiceless.

* * *

"Come and have dinner with me," Romanenko invited Voropayev as they were reaching the city boundary. Voropayev at first declined the invitation on the plea that he was tired, but in the end he was obliged to yield and became boyishly shy when he realized that the car was ascending the hill toward the palace in which the Soviet delegation was quartered.

Meanwhile, Romanenko placidly mused aloud about what Voropayev had come to, strongly urged him to return to the army, from

which he had still something to gain and which he had still something to give, and argued that, strictly speaking, all these kolkhoz adventures were scarcely suitable for a man of Voropayev's calibre.

"You can do as you like, of course, but I will speak to Vasili Vasilyevich about you," he said, taking Voropayev by the nape of the neck with his enormous hand and shaking him. "You remember him from the Transcaucasian Front? That's the man. Well, I certainly will talk to him and I am sure that it will reach *his* ears."

Romanenko raised his eyebrows so high when he stressed the word "his" that Voropayev guessed at once whom he meant.

The company at dinner was a small one—four Generals and three diplomats. Voropayev was the eighth, the guest. He fell into a humorous vein, a thing that had happened rarely with him lately. It seemed as though he had set out to make the four Generals and all three diplomats like him, and he succeeded. By the time lunch was over there were eight Generals in the room. Romanenko told them about Voropayev, ruthlessly prevaricating the circumstances of his life, but in such a way as to bring condemnation on the way he was

living now. But the other Generals took up the cudgels on his behalf and loudly asserted that he was a hundred per cent right, that one ought to go among the people when he had had enough of fighting.

The diplomats evasively laughed the matter off, but, on the whole, also backed him up.

Voropayev talked about country life as if he had been living in the country for many years. He was not envious of Romanenko who was going to Yugoslavia within the next few days, or of one of the diplomats who was going to the United States; he was not envious of the fact that all of them would lead lives rich in diverse impressions while he would remain in Sophia Ivanovna's house with the as yet unplastered ceilings from which dust, disturbed by mice, dribbled at night, would walk to his lectures and talks in the rain, and write letters to the front for people who were unable to write themselves.

Voropayev had climbed the social ladder for many years and had already become accustomed to being on a higher rung today than he had been on the day before and to being on a still higher rung the next day, and in this steady promotion he had found happiness.

But now he was thinking from an entirely different angle. The urge to descend again to the sources of life and human strength, not because he had been degraded but in order, as it were, to prepare for another leap upwards, was now as strong and insistent in him as the urge to rise had been in the past.

When dinner was over Romanenko, ignoring Voropayev's protests, drove him right home in his car.

"You'll have a lot to do, of course, to bring it up anywhere like the Vorontsov Palace in Alupka," he said, eyeing Sophia Ivanovna's house. "Still one can live in it. How many of you are there in it?"

Voropayev told him without going into details.

"Let me have a look at the rooms," and without waiting for an invitation, Romanenko strode into the house. His consideration looked rather crude.

Already in his car, after having inspected the house, he said patronizingly:

"The old woman is a witch, but the young one is not bad, not at all bad. All right, I'll tell them to send you some coal and building materials. But perhaps you'll come to Moscow after all, eh?..."

Voropayev drily bid him farewell. It was as much as he could do to restrain his anger.

* * *

Next morning, before he had managed to go down to breakfast in Lena's room, when he was still sitting on the edge of his bed without his artificial leg and Tanechka was frisking on his knee, the clink of spurs was heard and, barely knocking at the street door, Romanenko walked grandly into the house.

"Peace be unto this house!" he proclaimed in a stentorian voice, politely shaking hands with the old woman and bowing distantly to Lena who was making up her bed. "Lord, what wonderful doughnuts! . . . I could eat a dozen of them, but I'm sorry, I have no time. Get up, Alexei Veniaminich! You're wanted. . . . Come on, get his harness on," he said to Lena.

"Hey, go easy! I'm not serving under you yet," said Voropayev defiantly, and Romanenko did well not to answer.

A few moments later, however, they were already racing along the highroad that was wet from the thawing morning frost. It promised to be a beautiful day, which was rare in February. The sea, covered by a bluish haze, stretched ruffled and gleaming to the horizon.

The mountains were smoking like chimney stacks. The clouds were not floating across the sky, but rising upwards. A barefooted girl was picking her way along a path with a bunch of snowdrops in her hand.

"Stop!" Voropayev stopped the car and beckoned to her. "Whose little girl are you?"

"The Tvorozhenkovs'," answered the girl resentfully, twitching her shoulders.

"Which Tvorozhenkovs'?"

"Which can they be? Those that live opposite you. Surely you know!" the girl answered, quite angrily now.

"O-o-h! So you are Lenka Golaya Kolenka?"*

"That's right," the girl laughed. "Gee, you frightened me, asking which and which, as if you didn't know."

"Give me those flowers."

"Oh, I thought Comrade Stalin would ride past here and that I would see him. But never mind, take them."

Voropayev offered the flowers to Romanenko, but the latter pushed his hand away.

"No, no! Present them to a lady friend."

* * *

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* Lenka Bare Knees.—*Tr.*

It was long past midday when Voropayev left the General to whom Romanenko had introduced him. This time he lunched in the company of some General Staff officers he had not known before and with a Vice-People's Commissar. Naturally, they talked about how the Conference was proceeding, how the delegates had been met, what had been said and by whom and what hints had been dropped and by whom, but interesting though this conversation was, Voropayev hardly listened to what was being said round the table.

He was excited and tired by the interview he had just had and, still feeling its atmosphere, tried to recall whether he had conducted himself properly, whether he had not committed any blunders, or had in any way looked foolish. Again—and this time quite officially—he had received the very flattering invitation to return to the service.

"We don't need your legs, we need your head and your ability to wield the soldier's pen."

"A month ago I was only a passer-by here, but now I am already one of the active men. And they have nobody here at present."

"Aren't you afraid of being submerged in petty things?"

"Not in the least."

"In that case—I wish you success."

Of course, the conversation had been much longer and more varied, but just now, as Voropayev recalled it, it seemed to him that this brief part had been the most important and decisive. He was obliged to dine with Romanenko again and when that was over he asked to be taken home in the car. Now that he had rejected the invitation to return to that world, he felt restless and uncomfortable here. They stepped into the palace courtyard which was covered with heavy gravel. Voropayev's artificial leg slipped on the pebbles.

"When you come to Moscow for your son, ring me up and visit me," said Romanenko in a farewell tone.

"Of course, I will. It's rather dull here. When I get to Moscow I shall be thirsting for news," said Voropayev conciliatingly, regretting for an instant that he had cut off his return to the capital.

"You are doing an unwise thing, very unwise," Romanenko began very cordially, but at this moment somebody hailed them and said that they were to go back, not to the place they had just left, however, but to the garden, on the south side of the palace.

"Both of us?" enquired Romanenko, frankly not knowing what to do with Voropayev and hoping that the messenger would say: "No, only you, Comrade General," and that he would then be able to say good-bye to Voropayev and send him home in the car alone. But the answer that came was:

"No, Comrade General. Only the Colonel."

Romanenko's face turned as red as a cherry.

"Well, then, Alexei Veniaminich," he said without looking at Voropayev. "I'll go back to my room, and as soon as you are free you can get into my car and off you go home! So long!"

They hurriedly embraced and Voropayev, feeling sorry for Romanenko, hobbled after the guide. They went to the back of the house. They passed a sentry. The guide stopped. Voropayev stopped too. The guide motioned to the side with his eyes. In this instant Voropayev heard a voice that could not be mistaken.

"This way, please, Comrade Voropayev, don't be shy."

But Voropayev did not move. His legs would not obey him.

He saw Stalin.

In a light spring tunic and light peaked cap, Stalin was standing next to the old gardener near a clump of grapevines which, with their angular trailers, were clinging to the trellis against the wall. Glancing at Voropayev he continued to show the gardener something that evidently both were seriously interested in.

"Try that method, don't be afraid," Stalin was saying. "I have tried it myself, it won't let you down."

The gardener looked at him in embarrassment mixed with childish rapture and, spreading his arms out, said:

"I'm afraid to go against science, Joseph Vissarionovich. Under the tsar we had some experts down here, but they refrained."

"That's no argument," retorted Stalin. "Under the tsar people too grew badly, but we can't go by that. You must be bolder in your experiments! We need grapes and lemons not only in your parts."

"The climate sets the boundary, Joseph Vissarionovich. They are so frail and tender, they'll never stand frost!" said the gardener, pointing to the vines.

"Train them for severe conditions, don't be afraid! You and I are southerners, but we

don't feel bad in the North either," concluded Stalin, walking several paces to meet Voropayev.

"Good Lord!" whispered the gardener.

"He's right in front in doing foolish things, but when he has to answer for them you can't shift him," said Stalin, and Voropayev saw to his horror that he was advancing to meet him, holding out his hand and smiling his all-absorbing smile.

"I have been told that you lead kolkhozes here in assaults. That is very interesting, but not quite right, in my opinion."

Stalin shook hands and retaining Voropayev's hand in his own led him to a small table surrounded by cane armchairs, in one of which Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov was sitting. Every now and again men in the diplomatic service came to him and whispered something in his ear and he replied in an undertone. He held some papers in his hand. He shrugged his shoulders, apologizing with a smile for being busy.

Stalin was incredibly calm. It seemed as though of all things in the world what interested him most was Voropayev's fate and also, perhaps, the light-blue sky that nestled up warmly against the sea, at which he glanced

from time to time, screwing up his kindly eyes.

It seemed to Voropayev that Stalin had not aged at all since he had last seen him at the parade in the Red Square on November 7, 1941, but that he had changed in a different way.

His face was the same, familiar down to the smallest wrinkle, but it had acquired a new air, an air of triumph, and Voropayev rejoiced on observing this.

Stalin's face could not help changing and becoming slightly different, because the people looked into it as in a mirror in which they saw the reflection of themselves, and the people had changed, had become still more majestic.

Vyacheslav Mikhailovich helped to overcome the embarrassment of the first few moments and the conversation became general.

"I have been told about you, and in my opinion you have acted rightly in choosing district activities for yourself," said Stalin at once. "Unfortunately, we still have a lot of people who prefer to remain officials in Moscow rather than be leaders in the provinces."

He glanced at Molotov and the latter smiled, as if he knew to whom those remarks applied.

"We still have people like that," continued Stalin. "But their time will end soon.... Tell me, what, in your opinion, are the most urgent needs? Don't be shy, tell me." Stalin nestled more comfortably in his armchair and reached for the cigarette box. He did not have his pipe with him for some reason.

"People," answered Voropayev. "And primarily, clever people, Comrade Stalin."

Stalin laughed softly and glanced at Molotov. The latter smiled.

"Clever people are needed everywhere," said Vyacheslav Mikhailovich.

"You must make clever people, Comrade Colonel," said Stalin briskly, as if issuing an order. "You must make them yourselves on the spot and not wait until they come pouring down on your head from Moscow. How else? Nowhere is it written that clever workers are born only in Moscow."

"They grow here too, of course, but slowly, and the need is great. We have nobody anywhere," answered Voropayev, feeling that on this matter he would not receive Stalin's backing.

"How are you living yourself? Not finding it easy, are you?" enquired Stalin, giving Voropayev a sidelong glance as if wishing to

hear not so much what he knew already as the tone of the reply.

"Not easy."

"I am glad you said it right out. Sometimes you ask: 'How are you getting on?' and you get the answer: 'Fine,' when the truth is that the man you ask doesn't get a dinner every day.... Yes, life is hard for the time being, but tell the kolkhozniks that soon things will take a decisive turn for the better. The Party intends to grapple with the food problem with the same energy as it grappled with the problem of industrialization. We shall do everything to enable the people to begin to live well. Better than before the war. Tell me about the people here, where they come from and what they are doing."

Voropayev thought for a moment, turning over in his mind whom to start with, but evidently Stalin gained the impression that he was trying to find formal descriptions and he frowned with displeasure.

"Don't look for formulations, give us living pictures, we'll find the formulations ourselves."

And Voropayev, with deep emotion, began to tell him about all the people that were dear to him—about Victor Ogarnov, Pausov, Tsim-

bal, Maria Bogdanovna and her children's sanatorium, Annushka Stupina, the Podnebesko couple, Gorodtsov, about all those he associated with his dreams for the future.

"And yet you said you were in need of people," said Vyacheslav Mikhailovich in surprise. "Why, you have a veritable nursery garden here! We shall begin to take people from you soon."

Stalin remained silent for a long time, lighting and smoking a cigarette.

"If we put strength into people like the Podnebeskos, we will go a long way," he said quietly, as if speaking to himself.... "Or that girl Stupina ... she could rouse the people merely by her hatred for the Germans. If we direct that strength in the proper channel, of course. And take care of Tsimbal, see that he is not wronged in any way. We need restless old men like that, the young people respect them very highly.... Well, who else is there?..."

After putting more questions, and still more, he became lost in thought, suddenly retired within himself, as if mentally comparing what he had just heard with what he had heard before and ascertaining where the truth

lay; and then he livened up again, expressing pleasure at every new name he heard.

When Voropayev told him about how Gorodtsov was longing for wheat, that in his sleep he saw wheat fields stretching to the horizon, Stalin rose and paced up and down in deep reflection.

Voropayev got up too, not knowing whether to follow Stalin or remain at the table, but Molotov said:

"Keep where you are. Joseph Vissarionovich likes to be on the move when he is thinking."

Stalin returned to the table and said:

"Longing for wheat, is he? That's good. He is longing for the chief thing. But grapes, figs, apples . . . these are needed too. Tell him, this Gorodtsov, he is a soldier and he will understand, tell him that you here are in the second echelon, as it were, in the reserve. When we have solved the wheat problem we will take up your job."

Recalling the conversation he had had with the old gardener he became animated.

"Take this gardener. He has been on the job for forty-five years, but he is still afraid of science. This won't do, he says, the other

won't do. In Pushkin's time they imported eggplant into Odessa from Greece as a rarity, but fifteen years ago they began to grow tomatoes in Murmansk. The will was there, so they did it. Grapes, lemons and figs must also be pushed northwards. We were told that cotton would not grow in Kuban or in the Ukraine, but it did. The whole point is that the will should be there and that the necessary efforts should be made. Tell him that," Stalin repeated. "What did he say, that Gorodtsov? He sees wheat in his sleep?"

"Yes. He says: 'I see myself reaping wheat. When I wake up my muscles ache from the work and there is the smell of fresh grain in my room.' "

"Perhaps it would be good to send a man like Gorodtsov to the steppe districts to grow wheat?" Stalin suddenly suggested. "He is a Russian—a wheatgrower. Think it over. Talk to the leading men here about it. Well, what else can you tell me?"

Deeply moved by this inspiring heart-to-heart talk, Voropayev put his hand into his pocket and with his handkerchief he pulled out the bunch of snowdrops, which dropped to the ground.

The guide, who had been standing a little distance away, stepped forward and picked up the flowers. Voropayev slipped them into his pocket again.

Stalin watched him curiously.

"Pockets are not made for flowers, as far as I know," he said. "Give me your flowers. This is what we'll do." With that he placed the snowdrops among a huge bunch of flowers in a broad, low vase that was on the table. "But perhaps you intended them for somebody?"

Voropayev told him about the little Tvorozhenkova girl who had dreamed of presenting these flowers to Stalin and whose dream had so unexpectedly come true.

Stalin wondered how he could return this present and then called somebody and requested that some pastries be brought to him in a basket.

As soon as the basket was brought Voropayev asked for permission to go.

"You did well in deciding to do what you did, you did well," said Stalin, shaking hands with Voropayev. "Don't listen to any reproaches from anybody. We have far too many officials as it is. You did well, you did well!"

And looking straight into Voropayev's eyes, his face flashed, as if a sunbeam had passed across it.

* * *

The sun was already low on the horizon when he alighted from the car outside his house, and without going in to see Lena he ascended to his rooms by the outside staircase.

Almost immediately after she knocked at the door.

"Korytov is awfully angry. He's searching for you all over the town," she said in her low, even voice. "I told him that some General had called for you, but he said: 'I know, he's carousing with Generals somewhere instead of attending to his work.'"

"To hell with your Korytov! Do you know, Lena, I've just been with Stalin. Here, give these pastries to Lenka Tvorozhenkova, a present from Stalin."

Lena started forward and her lips froze before she could put her question, but her eyes asked:

"Well, are you remaining here or going away?"

"He said that I have done the right thing."

And as if they had talked about her too, as if the words "done the right thing" concerned not only Voropayev's decision to remain and work in the district but also her fate, she noiselessly stepped up to him, took his hand and put it to her cheek. Her cheek was trembling.

"I am going to lie down. I want to be alone. I don't want to see anybody. . . ."

"Go and lie down, I won't let anybody in. Will you eat something? Mother got some porpoise liver today, quite a holiday."

"No, thank you."

He lay down on top of the blanket. The stove had just been heated. She sat down near the bed. And he, hesitatingly at first, and then fervently lived over again aloud all that he had gone through that day. He conveyed the dialogue in the first person and Lena obtained a vivid picture of all that had happened. She smiled and lifted her hands in rhythm with his story. Suddenly he stopped short and stroked his hair:

"But I can't keep this to myself! I can't keep such a treasure about me, conceal it. . . . Run and fetch your Korytov!"

He embraced her.

"There's no need to call him, Alexei Veniaminovich," said Lena firmly and emphati-

cally, pushing his arms away. "Was there any talk about Korytov there? No. Was Comrade Korytov called there? No. What right, then, had you to make any report there about the district? The man will be offended."

Voropayev smiled, confessing to himself that she was right.

"Apart from the fact that it will cause jealousy and envy, I would say that it would not be good for yourself. It will sound like self-advertisement."

"So I ought to keep it a secret?"

"Why a secret? Do as you were advised to do... but why talk about it?"

"But, Lena, it's no more than out of love, don't you understand? Out of love for him...."

"The strength of love lies in deeds, Alexei Veniaminovich. Everybody can talk a lot, but not everybody can do things," and with that she got up and stepped quickly to the door.

He did not stop her. But when she was already on the balcony he called out to her:

"I have grown younger today, do you hear? Younger by a thousand years!"

"What did you say?" she enquired, not having caught what he said; but by the tone

of her voice he could tell that she was smiling and was expecting his affection.

He called out still more loudly:

"I am a thousand years younger!"

"I hope it will do you good."

"What, what, what?" he exclaimed exuberantly and called to her to come back, so loudly that the Tvorozhenkovs across the street must have heard him. But she did not come back.

They had not yet been intimate; but they felt that they could become so, and feared and anxiously expected it.

For them, who had gone through so much, it was not an easy thing to get together. Each had to contribute such a large and precious share to their joint lives and feared to be the loser by it.

* * *

Next morning, the advice that Lena had given him seemed wrong to Voropayev.

Of course, it was necessary to tell about his interview with Stalin, and however unpleasant it was to have to talk with Korytov on this subject, he saw no way of getting out of it.

Voropayev began without any preliminaries.

Korytov listened to him, gazing at the window and rubbing his temple.

"Naturally, naturally," he repeated every now and again for no apparent reason. "So you confined yourself to your own circle? Naturally. And you didn't say anything about Alexei Ivanovich Sukhov? He is the best brigadier. And not a word about the tobacco growers?"

"I was not making a report on the whole district. I talked only about the people I know."

"Naturally, naturally," repeated Korytov, still keeping his eyes off Voropayev, and one could tell that he was anxious to know whether there had been any talk about himself, that he was extremely alarmed about it, but that he felt it awkward to enquire. "Since this is a private matter we'll not generalize it."

"What do you mean, generalize?"

"We won't bring it up at the Bureau, and, in general, we'll not give it wide circulation, so to speak."

Voropayev looked at Korytov in surprise.

"I can understand you being envious. If I were in your place I, perhaps, would react in the same way. But how can I keep quiet about the words that were addressed to Gorodtsov, about what was said concerning Podnebesko?"

"You have told me, I have taken note of it, we'll confer on the matter and draw conclusions. But what's Gorodtsov got to do with it? If you tell him, he'll trumpet it all over the world: 'Oh, there was talk about me, they said this and they said that.' And if you're not careful he'll make it out to be more than it was. I categorically forbid it."

"So that's what you mean by 'we won't generalize'? I'll think it over. I don't know yet whether you are right, but it seems to me that you are absolutely wrong."

They parted after having wearied each other, firmly convinced that they would never be friends.

Rumours spread quickly, however. Two or three days later Tsimbal and Gorodtsov dashed into Voropayev's house and announced that the Ogarnovs, Yuri Podnebesko and Stupina were also coming as soon as they could get a lift on a truck coming in this direction. The visitors did not say what they had come for, but the grave and excited expressions on their faces explained a great deal.

Stupina burst into the room gasping for breath. Instead of shaking hands she put her hand to her throat and stood in the corner of the room further away from the lamp. Varvara,

eagerly relating something on the staircase, entered on her tiptoes in her creaking new shoes. Yuri and Victor Ogarnov silently nodded to Voropayev as if they had come not on a visit, but to a meeting.

Lena tried to entertain the visitors, but the latter looked at her with such astonishment that she became embarrassed and fell silent.

Nobody spoke. Everybody waited for Voropayev to speak.

Voropayev sat at his writing desk watching their faces.

"I want to tell you about a wonderful event that has occurred in my life," he began. "It is a private matter, my own personal experience. I shall confide it to you, my friends. Do you understand me? Each one of you will draw his or her own conclusions from what I tell you, and only for themselves. The other day I had the good fortune to be called by Comrade Stalin. I entered just as he was finishing a conversation he was having with the old gardener there."

"With Ivan Zakharich?" interjected Tsimbal. "Well, well. . . ."

"I don't know his name. I entered, and I was so excited that at first I didn't see Stalin."

"Stop, stop, stop," Gorodtsov interrupted with a wave of his hand. "Now tell it in order, Alexei Venianminich, as I do when I relate anything. Where did this happen? Who was present?"

"What does it matter where it happened? It's the main thing that's important."

"To be able to know what the main thing is you must tell us everything. Well, you went in . . ." said Gorodtsov encouragingly, fearing that Voropayev would skip the most important thing.

Quiet reigned in the room. The visitors got up from their seats and gathered round Voropayev.

He came out from behind his desk and stood in the middle of the room.

"Stalin was discussing something with the gardener and advising him to adopt some method of cultivation or grafting and the old man was objecting to it and arguing that the climate here prevented us from doing a lot of things."

Tsimbal tried to interject some remark at this point but he was sh-shed into silence.

"Comrade Stalin advised him to be more bold in his experiments and not to be afraid of science."

"Obviously, that was Ivan Zakharovich," said Tsimbal, now feeling certain who it was Stalin had been talking to and displeased with the fact. "He's been playing hide-and-seek with nature for forty years."

"Sh, sh, sh!"

"And then Comrade Stalin talked to me, chided me gently for leading assaults. . . ."

"So somebody had reported it already," commented Gorodtsov, proud of the precision with which the district apparatus was working. "Smart work that, by God it was."

Voropayev flared up.

"Will you let me go on or not?"

"Go on, go on! But you are like a delayed action bomb, you get on our nerves. Tell it more smoothly!" Gorodtsov wiped the perspiration from his brow with his handkerchief. He was burning with desire to be with Stalin himself and was convinced that he would not confuse the story, or keep anything back.

". . . Chided me for leading assaults here, and then began to ask me about the people here, how they are working, who they are. . . . Step back a bit, why are you crowding round like this. . . . I told him about you all."

Nobody uttered a word. All gazed at him with bated breath.

"I told him about Tsimbal...."

"You told Stalin?" enquired Stupina.

"...And about you, Yuri, and about Natasha; and about you, Gorodtsov, and you, Victor, and you, Annushka. I told him what a hard time you are having, and how much you are doing, how you are surmounting difficulties, and how you are building life...."

The visitors remained silent.

"I told him that you see wheat in your sleep, Gorodtsov."

"Lord, how come you to tell him that, Comrade Voropayev?... And what did he say?"

"He walked up and down, thought awhile and then he said: 'He's longing for the chief thing, the big thing.' He asked me to tell you that we here are the second echelon, the reserve. When the grain problem is solved, they'll take up our job. 'But if Gorodtsov finds it hard,' he said, 'send him to the steppe, to grow wheat.' "

"Me? To the steppe? No, I reject your communiqué. Once I take up a position, you'll never knock me out of it. That's what you ought to have said. I'll show the stuff I'm made of without going to the steppe. That's what you should have said, and no mistake."

"Do be quiet, neighbour," said Yuri. "He

didn't say anything bad about you. But what consideration Stalin showed, do you feel it? He was concerned about you!"

"What, have I got a kink of some kind that you should talk about me like that? I don't think I'm sick. No, you didn't say the right thing."

Annushka Stupina stepped out of the dark corner and elbowing the others aside stood in front of Voropayev pale and silent. She was unable to ask anything; she just waited to hear what would fall to her lot.

Voropayev put his arm round her trembling shoulders.

"About you I told him how you wandered through Europe, how you fought the Germans in the concentration camps, and what a holy hatred for the enemy you have carried through all your trials. And he...."

"Stalin?" she enquired with a gasp.

"Yes. He said: 'If this hatred of Stupina's....' "

"Is that what he said: Stupina?"

"Yes. 'If this hatred of Stupina's is directed in the proper channel, she could move mountains.' "

"It's true! I can! It's quite right what he said. And did he refer to me by name?"

She flung her arms round Voropayev's neck and said in a wailing tone:

"Now why did you tell him about me? What shall I do now, eh?"

"What do you mean?" Voropayev failed to understand her emotion.

"What shall I do now, I'm asking you? Stalin said that Stupina can move mountains.... But have I moved any? You have given me away entirely. Here I've been living up till now and nobody knew anything about me. But now? Suddenly, Comrade Stalin will remember and say: 'What about that Anna Stupina, what's she doing? Make enquiries.' It gives me the creeps to think about it! Of course, he may forget about me. But suppose he doesn't? I've lost my peace of mind forever."

"Wait a bit, girlie. We've all lost our peace of mind after this talk. Go on, Veniaminich, let's have it, right to the last word. There must be no secrets here."

Voropayev went on to tell them what Stalin had said about the Government taking up the food problem with the same energy as it had taken up the problem of industry, about the present difficulties being transient, and about it being their duty to think how all kinds of crops could be raised here.

Gorodtsov listened with a discontented frown.

"It's like being surrounded, by God it is. You've put us in an awkward hole," he said when Voropayev finished his story. "Thanks, of course, for putting in a kind word for us, but you overdid it. Praised us too much. Suppose he does order an investigation, what have we got to show? Very careless of you, Alexei Veniaminich, very!"

"Yes, you overdid it," Tsimbal chimed in, agreeing with Gorodtsov.

"We've got to buck in now and show results even if we have to jump over our own heads."

They sighed. Victor Ogarnov added:

"It's as if we have received a reward, but we don't know what for."

"What experiments is that Ivan Zakharich making out there?" enquired Yuri. "We ought to give that Ivan Zakharich a shaking up and make him tell us what advice he got. Greedy old beggar. I saw him yesterday, but he didn't say a word about it."

"He'd tell you a lot! But he'll never manage the job, the bald old devil," said Tsimbal, and turning to Gorodtsov he asked: "Shall we go and see him?"

"Sure!" the latter answered. "A practical matter should be taken up at once. Let's go!"

Varvara Ogarnova, noisily upsetting a stool, ran out of the room. Her face was flushed from restrained tears. She tried to say something, but she only waved her hand in despair as she passed through the door. Nothing had been said about her, and she was mortally offended.

Everybody felt awkward about it.

"Come on, let's go!" said Gorodtsov impatiently.

They began to take their leave.

Annushka Stupina decided to go with the rest, although Lena tried to detain her.

"No, no, I must go too!" she insisted.

"D'you know, I feel altogether different, Lena. I feel as though I've grown up all of a sudden, as if I've been put in a responsible job. No, no, I can't stay behind, not for anything. How can I?" and she ran out of the room and into the yard, carrying all the rest with her. When the cart moved off she began to sing, and for a long time her shrill, girlish voice could be heard above the noises of the street.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In the beginning of April the troops of the Third Ukrainian Front marched through Hungary towards Austria.

Although tired after the prolonged battles at Budapest and Lake Balaton, their ranks greatly thinned and with an unprecedentedly high percentage of wounded who had remained in the line, the regiments made dashes of fifty kilometres in a night—a hundred in twenty-four hours. Hell! What kind of infantry could compete with these troops who were racing along, providing their own fodder for their oxen, their own fuel for their motorcycles and trucks, asking neither for fuel nor food, asking for nothing except ammunition, and demanding only uninterrupted movement, forward and forward towards the end of the war.

The dash to Vienna necessarily had to be sharp and precise, everybody knew that per-

fectly well, and the first to be left behind were the oxen. The oxcarts were occupied mainly by the wounded who, contrary to orders, were moving not to the rear, not eastwards, to the hospitals, but forward, behind their divisions, but at a respectable distance so as not to be in the way. The oxcarts hauled the rearmost of the rear administrations; they moved slowly, but they moved and flowed with the general stream.

The well-made but narrow Austrian roads could not contain this flood of oxen and horses, and terrific jams were caused at crossroads or temporary bridges, to the joy of the German airmen who ruthlessly bombed these gigantic targets. But during such air raids nobody ran away, no attempt was made to disperse; everybody who could took advantage of the confusion to dart into some fissure in the crowd, to push forward and cut out the others.

At the approaches to Vienna, however, these spontaneously formed ox and horse baggage trains were left behind, stretching two or three marches in the rear of the main forces, and the roads were occupied by motor trucks and cars dashing at terrific speed.

The Fourth Guards Army, to which Voropayev's corps belonged, was the first to

dash—hot on the heels of the Germans—into the southern suburbs of Vienna and then, replacing the unit on its right flank, it engaged the enemy in the suburb of Simmering, on the eastern boundary of the city.

Alexandra Ivanovna Goreva, who all this time had been with her Medical Service Battalion, was now temporarily under the orders of the chief surgeon of the army, and could easily have found work at the surgical hospital, but she categorically insisted on working during these days in the Medical Service Battalions of the divisions that were storming Vienna.

The weather was windy, but warm and showery, characteristic of early April. This year, the capricious Danube spring was exceptionally nervous: it was too cold to leave one's greatcoat off, but too hot to wear it.

Alexandra Ivanovna was preparing to go out to join a division that was advancing from the south. She had already chosen her companions and had obtained a car, but just as she was about to start off, she was advised to go to the eastern suburbs where it was urgently necessary to replace a unit and at the same time to establish contact with the Danube flotilla. Guided by the experience of Budapest, the battle for Vienna was expected

to be a prolonged one and the casualties heavy, so the question of the timely evacuation of the wounded acquired grave importance.

Listening to the advice and instructions, however, Goreva definitely made up her mind not to consult anybody about withdrawing the wounded, but see to it that they reach the operating table no later than one hour after they had been wounded.

The experience of Kishinev, Jassy, and particularly of Budapest, suggested to her that there was no need to take the wounded to the rear, that now, when victory was near, skilled hands willing to render, if not friendly, then at all events perfectly loyal, surgical assistance would be found everywhere.

She recalled how many strong and healthy men with Red Cross badges on their arms had rushed about the streets of Budapest, or were resting in its cellars during the hottest battles for the city.

Some had called themselves doctors, others had modestly said that they were only medical students, others again had offered their services as stretcher-bearers, while still others were only the relatives of medical men. But Alexandra Ivanovna had only to find among

them a genuine doctor, to appoint one of her nurses to assist him, and to make him responsible for the whole of this noisy and, perhaps, somewhat suspicious-looking gang of idlers, and in two hours she had an underground dressing station which functioned faultlessly for several days on end and roused universal admiration.

... The army's second echelon was about thirty-five kilometres southeast of Vienna.

Unfortunately, a civilian has no clear idea of what a "second echelon" is, and as nobody has so far described the life of this peculiar organism, there is nobody to whom the curious reader can be referred.

A second echelon is, perhaps, what in the theatre would be called "behind the scenes" of a play. The play is performed by the actors, but the people who have prepared the play, wearily and, perhaps, indifferently watch the actors from the wings. The second echelon of a theatre are the costumiers, the wigmakers, the makers-up, the carpenters, the limelight and sound operators, and the stage hands.

The second echelon consists not of the soloists but the craftsmen, not the heroes but the servants of heroism, not those who

decide but those who prepare decisions—they are the prosaic bookkeepers of the war.

In the second echelon there are hospitals, stores, workshops, printing plants and editorial offices. Here they mend boots, patch breeches, repair tanks, collect and despatch ammunition and fuel, keep account of casualties and awards, of cowardice and heroism.

Here justice is dispensed. Here they verify slander and draw up reports on missing stores. Thanks to this, life in the second echelon is not lacking in the elements of purely rear stability, rhythm and system. Here there is more order and precision. Here, sometimes, people go visiting and meet for a hand at "pool."

The people in the second echelon are officials rather than soldiers, nevertheless, they are a most important element in the war; without them the heroism of the soldier would be impossible.

Goreva disliked the second echelon and its people and did not get on well with them. She felt an irresistible urge to be nearer to the scene of danger, although she could not help knowing that the people there were the same as those in the second echelon, except, perhaps, that they had been under fire more.

Taking her little brown suitcase, Alexandra Ivanovna drove out in an open jeep accompanied by Dr. Tomashov, a gynecologist before the war, but now an incompetent army surgeon who most of the time was employed as an administrator.

The dumpy jeep, careering madly round the curves of the splendidly-asphalted road, swiftly carried them far to the east of the city and, just before reaching the Danube, the famous speedway mentioned in all guidebooks that runs to Vienna from Bratislava, swerved sharply on to it and raced towards the city.

A grey mist hung over Vienna like that over Leningrad in the autumn; but on the Danube, on its light green islands, and on the highway, it was sunny and very warm. A lark, rising in a spiral, carried its song into the sky, just like in Russia, somewhere on the Krasivaya Mech.

The naval batteries were posted right near the road. The sailors, of course, had no idea what infantry units were ahead of them, or whether there were any there at all.

They calmly went on directing their fire on the left bank of the Danube and were not interested in anything else. The battery truck

driver however, casually remarked that "this morning the Staff of some corps, I don't know which," was posted in a large cemetery in the suburb of Simmering, about three kilometres from where they were.

Soon, thanks to this sailor's error or imagination, Goreva emerged from a narrow, filthy, suburban street lined with tall uncomfortable-looking houses, smoke-begrimed from conflagrations, into a green shady cemetery, large and old, with orange-coloured paths made from crushed bricks, with signposts at the crosspaths and refuse boxes along the avenues.

An old man wearing a black, oilcloth apron and mittens of the same material was carefully sweeping the main avenue which was littered with twigs and leaves after a recent air raid.

"To the right, then through two avenues on the left," he shouted.

Goreva ordered the driver to stop.

The old man, wonderingly, raised his cap.

"Where are you directing us to?" she enquired.

"To the musical composers' section, of course, Madame," answered the caretaker gravely. "The only thing the Russians credit us

with is music," he added, daring to smile mournfully.

"Thanks. . . . Drive on as he said."

The driver jammed the brakes on just in time to avoid running into a long column of motor trucks and cars which blocked a narrow cross avenue.

About fifty of our men, mostly officers, were standing in a crowd at a little distance away; from somewhere came the strains of an accordion, and the faint odour of wine pervaded the air. Two Lieutenants were hauling a huge metal wreath, obviously removed from a near-by grave.

Goreva was highest in rank among those present. They stepped aside to form a lane to let her pass, gazing wonderingly at her. Involuntarily yielding to the situation, she walked through the crowd and at once found herself in a small open space that was closely surrounded by gravestones and gratings. Almost in the middle of this space stood a tall monument on which she read the name "Ludwig van Beethoven," but the living lane prevented her from halting at Beethoven's grave; it turned her further to the right, to the monument over the grave of Strauss, the composer of the Viennese waltzes.

A young accordion player, squatting on one knee at the base of the monument (evidently at the request of an excited photographer or cinema operator) was ready to begin.

To Goreva's surprise, the grave was sprinkled with bunches of fresh flowers, and it turned out that the metal wreaths had been needed to serve as a background.

"Is this really Strauss' grave?" she asked in embarrassment, although she saw the inscription.

She did not like the monument. Nude women listlessly rotating to the accompaniment of what looked like shepherd's pipes. Do they symbolize the waltzes of Vienna, sparkling, poetical, charming and enchanting, even when you are only listening and not dancing?

"Exactly, Comrade Lieutenant Colonel of the Medical Service, Strauss' grave!" the men answered Goreva in chorus. "There's a whole platoon of them here. . . ."

Hastily walking round the glade and scarcely noticing that here too were the graves of Brahms and even Lanner, she, more hurriedly than seemed proper, returned to her jeep.

She must come again to see these graves, but alone.

"Where to, Alexandra Ivanovna?" enquired the driver, switching on to first gear and at once slowly slipping into second.

"The city!"

* * *

This was the third day of the battle, and it was exceptionally fierce in the eastern sector, in the region of Prater and the Danube Canal, the very sector in which Goreva arrived. In two or three places dead horses were lying, piled up like a dam, across the canal, and on these dead carcasses tommy gunners were creeping, as if on a bridge, to the side still occupied by the Germans.

Hour after hour apartment houses and whole blocks of houses were battered and wrecked, new streets were occupied. All the time prisoners came pouring in in vast numbers. Sometimes they came running out from under fire and kept on running with their hands up for a long time after they were out of danger.

Goreva was told of a gallant battalion that had pushed ahead of the rest and in which no more than sixty men were left. A German had come to this battalion to surrender, but the Commander had sent him back with the parting message:

"I don't take less than a dozen! Tell 'em that!"

An hour later that German returned with about three dozen of his mates, and after that the Germans did not surrender singly.

These and other signs, which cannot be described in words, told Goreva that they were wrong in the second echelon in thinking that the battle would be a prolonged one.

A battle for a city, or rather, street fighting lasting many days and assuming diverse forms is the most difficult of military operations. Contact with the enemy is only a matter of metres, there are no definite flanks, nor even, sometimes, a definitely-held rear, there are only streets which the men have succeeded in crossing with more or less impunity. Communication is cut every minute. Bombs drop on friend and foe alike, and no operative despatches can keep up with the living tempo of battle. And lastly, the underground base with its thousands of underground passages is pregnant with surprises.

That had been the opinion of all the Commanders with whom Goreva had come in contact during the war, and it had been most tenaciously held by her friend Voropayev; but she herself had always found street fighting a thrilling affair.

On leaving the cemetery and its composers' graves, she dashed into the lines of the division commanded by General Korolenko, an affable Ukrainian with an enormous pot belly on which now and again he crossed his puffy, white hands like a corpulent old woman. Korolenko was famed for his prowess and cunning, and his division was one of the best. At present it was fighting for the Danube Canal. Goreva had come here to inspect the Medical Service Battalion, but she decided to stay with the division until Vienna was liberated and intended to go at once to one of the forward battalions.

General Korolenko treated her to a splendid lunch and when she left he gazed after her from the top of the staircase of his quarters and again from the balcony, and even called to her once or twice as if wishing to see her turn round, raise her head and smile.

Without the least delay, Goreva plunged into the mad swirl of street-fighting life. It was possible to contact a battalion by telephone, but what was doing in the companies, even the battalions did not know. The wounded, however, in spite of the heavy mortar fire and the fierce cannonade from the other side of the Danube, reached the Medical Serv-

ice Battalion and regimental dressing station in small parties.

Goreva guessed what this meant. Taking with her Frosya Shapovalenko, a senior orderly, who that very day had visited all the units, she set out for the battalion that was fighting only half a kilometre away.

They passed through big courtyards with shattered walls and fences. They climbed over fences, ran across gardens and again took shelter in houses. Under cover of sheds, closed gates, and shop premises, field kitchens were heated and tanks were repaired. In one of the courtyards, severely-wounded men were lying on mattresses stretched on the asphalted ground. They were waiting for the ambulances, but at present it was impossible for any vehicle to reach them. The narrow street was barricaded with heavy objects to protect the coming and going of the medical orderlies. Stretcher-bearers, following the directions chalked on the walls, passed from apartment to apartment, stepped out on the landings, descended to the basements, crossed courtyards and were again swallowed up in the bowels of houses.

Soon Goreva and her companion found themselves within the lines of the battalion.

"Haven't you just come from the front, Alexandra Ivanovna?" enquired awe-struck senior orderly Frosya.

"Yes. I am a surgeon."

"And you are going to perform operations right here?" the girl asked incredulously, but in the same awe-struck tone.

"If there will be any."

"We at once got to know at our Staff Headquarters that a surgeon had arrived straight from the front and we were wondering what it meant. I suppose we are going to attack, aren't we, Comrade Lieutenant Colonel?"

"I think we have been attacking for the past three days, haven't we?"

"Do you call this an attack?" exclaimed the girl. "We are all absolutely worn out, done in, no time for a bite, no time for a wink of sleep. There's only one thing we're longing for—to get a move on, to advance." Suddenly, forgetting all respect for title, she shouted to Goreva: "Stop!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look at the wall!"

The dirty-white blank wall at the far end of a through courtyard was pitted with dazzling white dents.

"They were not there when I was going to Staff Headquarters. There must be a sniper around here," and they took cover under the opposite wall.

The carefully swept and swabbed asphalted courtyard and zinc garbage cans ranged staidly along the blank wall, the box for metal scrap and the pile of eight-kilogram paper packets of sand next to it, evidently prepared for extinguishing incendiary bombs, all looked so peaceful that it was positively unbearable to lie at the end of this yard with at least thirty windows staring at you.

Goreva, blushing, got up, but the girl roughly pulled her to the ground again.

"Don't show off, Comrade Doctor, please. We may be carried out of this yard dead today."

Just at this moment, like in a scene in a play, one of the doors of the house opened (evidently the back-stairs entrance) and a lady emerged, about fifty years of age, wearing a dressing gown and some kind of metal tubes in her tousled hair. She was humming, and she carried a cute little porcelain pail with garbage. Glancing at the women lying near the wall as if they were shadows, she emptied the pail in garbage can No. 3, near

which they were lying. She saw nobody, she was not concerned with anybody, she kept on humming to herself. Goreva jumped to her feet. A shot rang out. The tinkle of broken crockery (the old lady's pail) was heard. Frosya darted to the side pulling Alexandra Ivanovna with her, and they saw the woman discontentedly pick up the shards of the broken pail and disappointedly throw them into garbage can No. 3, without glancing round, without surprise, without complaint.

"Did you see that?" said Frosya. "They missed."

The old lady returned to the house.

"Who fired?" Goreva did not expect a reply so much in words as in the play of the old woman's face.

"I don't know," she heard, and suddenly an outburst of irrepressible "Voropayev" fury gripped and hammered at her temples.

"Stand when a Russian officer is speaking to you! Answer my questions! Who fired?"

She heard a window open behind her.

"Madame, excuse me, I am a civilian. . . ."

Goreva put her hand to her holster.

"Herrin Offizier . . . pardon, pardon. . . . Herr Offizier . . . the shot came from that block, and I don't know anybody there."

"Go up to that block and shout out that if another shot is fired you, yes, I mean you, will be shot on the spot. Go on!"

The woman shrugged her shoulders and looked down at the ground.

"I am not dressed . . ." but she hurriedly went to the further end of the yard, adjusting her gown every now and again.

A man with a Red Cross badge on his arm came running up. He wore a well-made suit and a very dirty light cape over it.

"Permit me. . . . May I offer you my services?"

"Are you a surgeon? No. A medical student? No. A medical orderly? Not even that. What are you then? Oh, a doctor of philosophy. You are here to carry wounded and to see them home when their wounds have been dressed? I see! Where is your dressing station? On the first floor? Why not on the ground floor? You don't know? Take me to the place. Frosya! Stay here, dear, and if you see any wounded men, send them up here to the first floor. No, better to the ground floor."

"Do you need my automatic, in case?"

"No. I have a 'Walter'."

* * *

"This room will be the dressing station," she said.

"This is the drawing room, Madame. But, pardon me, it will be done as you say."

"In the other seven rooms we'll place twenty-five wounded."

"Oh, Madame, c'est impossible. Not more than five."

"In your so-called ambulance brigade there are twelve exceedingly healthy men. . . ."

"Madame, they are musicians, you cannot demand much from them."

"And fifteen women!"

"Wives, wives, Madame, wives and servants. . . . Please, excuse me."

"Of these twenty-seven, only one surgeon and you will be doing any work. Let the rest at least give up their beds. For a time. But I will not interfere. I have you down like this, Herr Max Liebersmut, look: 'First Voluntary Dressing Station, Director, M. Liebersmut, Ph.D.' I wish you success. I will come to inspect you between 5 and 6 p.m. Vienna time."

"I admire your courage, Madame, I am dazzled . . ." murmured the philosopher.

"That's most unfortunate, Dr. Liebersmut. You will need your eyes very much today."

She lit a cigarette. Without the slightest embarrassment the doctor of philosophy caught in his mouth the smoke that she exhaled. There was a blissful look on his face.

"You haven't had a smoke for a long time, Doctor?"

"Oh, Madame, pendant quelques mois. Thank you, I am so grateful.... No, no, not more than three. Heavens, it's fine! Bulgaria, of course?... You don't say? Really? Humph!... It is good. I'll save the mouthpiece.... The first Soviet cigarette I've smoked.... How exotic.... Georgian!... Enchanting!... I mean it seriously.... It has enchanted me with its incense.... Is Madame a Georgian?"

"No, I am a Russian. So long. Between five and six."

"I am all expectation, Madame."

The wounded arrived in rather large batches. The blockade caused by that solitary sniper had held them up for a long time and they were utterly tired and exhausted; all the more urgently, therefore, did they now—when the sniper had abandoned his position and the road was open—need this unexpected first-aid station halfway between the battalion and the regiment.

Among the garbage cans a flag attached to a long pole was already flying bearing the inscription:

"Hospital for twenty-five men."

Liebersmut received the patients. Dr. Hobošek (a Viennese Czech) and Dr. Johann Baleš (a Viennese Magyar) dressed their wounds. Frau Selzer, a Serbian, the wife of a violinist at the Volksopera acted as interpreter. Two nurses from the Army Reinforcement Group whom Frosya found came in to assist.

The sounds of a gramophone were already heard coming from the back rooms.

"The main thing, Madame, is that we should not be bombed," said Liebersmut, as he accompanied Goreva across the courtyard, his whole body twitching like a dog tormented by fleas. They were just passing those damned garbage cans that the sniper had shot at that morning.

"That's not the main thing, Dr. Liebersmut. The main thing is that you should become men."

"Pardon me! What did you say?"

"Men, men."

"Ah, yes, of course! We will, Madame, we will! We will be anything you please, as

long as we are not bombed. This is Vienna, Madame. What can you expect? Vienna! Our characters are musical rather than stern. The climate is mild but capricious, feminine, isn't that so? This beautiful climate makes you fall in love with it, and it is as hard to live without Vienna as it is without.... You know what I mean, Madame ... without someone who is dear to you. Isn't that so? And then, les beaux arts, eh? You can't live without them. They are part of the air we breathe. Whether we like it or not—we dance.... Oh, please, don't laugh, Madame!... We have been dancing for ages. It is already a tradition among us. Pardon? Yes, yes, I understand."

* * *

At the end of the day she was sitting behind the armour of a self-propelled gun. In the neighbouring division, which had pushed almost into the centre of the city, in the labyrinth of narrow and canyonlike streets, Golyshev, the Commander of the forward regiment, lay wounded, and she had received a telephone call to go and see him because he refused to retire and go into hospital. She was only a little distance away from him, but

what was a little distance away on the map was cut off by a raging battle.

The gun dashed through the conflagrations and fierce machine-gun fire.

Sitting with her back to the driver, Goreva saw only snatches of the streets the gun left behind as it raced along. She did not like the city. The streets were excellently paved, but narrow, dingy and dusty. Scarcely any trees or gardens were visible. The smoke-coloured buildings did not look beautiful. On the sidewalks there were rows of stretchers with dead Germans on them. Evidently, they were being carried somewhere and had been abandoned on the way. A traffic regulator, kneeling under cover of an anti-aircraft gun, called out:

"Is it a surgeon you are carrying?"

"Yes, yes, a surgeon. . . . Look out—you'll be run over."

She jumped off while the gun was still in motion. Somebody caught her under the arms. She felt her belt being pulled.

"Please be careful. Sixteen steps down. This is our C.P."

* * *

For a moment she screwed up her eyes from the dazzling light and involuntarily halted on the threshold on finding so many people in the room. Somebody greeted her, but she did not recognize anybody. She felt embarrassed, and without glancing at anybody, she said in a low voice:

"I will ask all those who are not needed to leave the room."

Nobody budged. She guessed that they wanted to hear her opinion about the Major's condition.

The surgeon who had dressed the wound was sitting dejectedly near the patient's bed. He was no more than twenty-five, and he looked awfully disconcerted.

"How d'you do, Major?" She touched Golyshev's moist, wax-coloured palm and guessed at once that he had lost a lot of blood and was tired and nervous. "What's happened?"

The young surgeon said, scratching his chin:

"Splinter in the lung. Must be evacuated immediately in my opinion."

Nevertheless, Golyshev's face, and particularly his eyes, were bright and cheerful.

"Evacuate? What's his pulse? Temperature?"

The surgeon handed her a scrap of paper on which some figures had been carelessly jotted. Reading them, her face expressed surprise.

"Is this all?"

Evidently the splinter had not entered the lung but was sticking between the ribs, and she realized that Golyshev would refuse to leave while his regiment was fighting for the centre of the city.

She looked into Golyshev's eyes. He winked at her in a conspiratorial way.

"Let's not hurry," she said as if she had not noticed the wink. "I don't think Golyshev feels very bad, and there is no need to disturb him. Where's your telephone? I'll ring up and say that I will stay here for a while."

"The conditions here are so primitive," said the surgeon with an emphasized air of importance, "that in the interest of Comrade the Major. . . ."

"Show me where the telephone is," Goreva interrupted, getting up. Her way was barred by a fat, gloomy Colonel.

"Now you be more careful, my dear young lady. This case requires special attention. This is not Golyshev's first day at the front. I will telephone Professor Spassky."

"I don't care how long Golyshev has been at the front, or even you, for that matter, even if it's a day. And I am not your dear young lady, but a Lieutenant Colonel. And lastly, please leave the room, you are interfering with my work. As for Professor Spassky, I will telephone him myself."

She was the first to leave the room.

"Where's your telephone here?"

She went out amidst general silence and for a long time wandered through corridors which appeared to be descending lower and lower. Nobody offered to accompany her; she could have cried from vexation. Suddenly, a door opened softly ahead of her. She darted towards it . . . and stood transfixed. In front of her stood a large woman in black with something that looked like a white, starched box on her head, in her hand she held a string of beads. Both women had been so startled by this sudden encounter that they could not utter a word.

Suddenly, the nun darted back to the door, opened it and vanished like an apparition. Meanwhile, voices were heard in the corridor. They were looking for Goreva. Several men gathered round her.

"You have taught us a lesson, Alexandra

Ivanovna," said a tall, lean Lieutenant Colonel of the Army Intelligence, an old acquaintance of Goreva's. "But I don't think it is worth while telephoning Divisional Headquarters."

"Come, Doctor, come," the others urged her.

"Very well, then, Comrades, but you must leave me alone with Golyshev."

"So you think it is better not to take him away?"

"I am convinced. Why shake up the man? And the main thing: why take him from the regiment when victory is at hand? Go, please go, there's good fellows. Wish him good luck and don't let me see you again!"

She returned to the room where Golyshev was lying.

The regimental surgeon was beating his breast with childish persistence and saying to the patient:

"But regime is not what you think it is, Klimenti Pavlovich. It is not four meals a day and smoke less, it is. . . ."

He turned round to Goreva.

"He won't use the bottle, think of it! As for the bedpan, I daren't even mention it," he said horror-stricken.

"There's nobody in my regiment to clean out my pans," said Golyshev heatedly, ignoring the surgeon.

The room filled with people again.

Goreva said emphatically:

"Your pans can easily be cleaned by one of the nuns here. Take an interpreter," she added, turning to the surgeon, "and go at once and arrange it with them."

Forgetting about his wound, Golyshev rose up on his elbow.

"Wait a minute, what nuns are you talking about? I've been here for nearly twenty-four hours . . ." he looked enquiringly at his adjutant.

Goreva told him about the nun she had met in the corridor. The Lieutenant Colonel of the Army Intelligence dashed into the corridor followed by Golyshev's adjutant. The rest animatedly discussed Goreva's discovery.

"Are you in a hurry to go anywhere?" Golyshev asked her after a pause when they were left alone.

"I wanted to go to Korolenko's Division today."

"Stay with me. Now tell me honestly, I'm in a bad way, eh?"

"Judging by your general appearance, your condition is excellent. But this is the

point, Major. I am going into battle now. All right? Do you trust me?"

"As one soldier trusts another."

"Good!"

* * *

Golyshev's wound, though rather severe, was not dangerous, and several times Goreva thought of returning to Korolenko's Division. But she was so tired that she felt she had not the strength for a mad dash through the burning streets on a rattling self-propelled gun.

She sat at the bedside of the wounded man near whom had again gathered all those whom circumstances had thrown into this isolated regiment that was creeping from house to house. The Regimental Headquarters were crowded with officers from army and divisional administrations, engineers who were to restore bridges as yet to be captured, transport engineers waiting to take charge of vehicles as yet to be captured, quartermasters waiting to put seals on stores as yet not captured, sappers, trophymen, intelligence officers, prosecutors, officers from the Political Administration of the front with slogans and posters, cinema operators and cameramen and officers of the Traffic Regulation Department

with signposts bearing the names of places west of Vienna and crossing indicators for squares in the city as yet not captured. Since the morning they had been crowding all the forward Regimental Headquarters hurrying the Commanders and impatiently glancing at their watches as if they and not others were responsible for clearing the city in the shortest possible time.

Golyshev's regiment had pushed to the very centre. It was said that St. Stephen's Cathedral, the Opera House, the Palace and the Parliament, all the sights of Vienna, were right close by.

"Oh, we must go and see!" said Goreva half-sleepily. "Shall we go tomorrow morning?"

"Everything is shot to blazes, I have roamed all over the place," said an elderly Captain of the Administration and Stores Service with a sort of tourist's delight. "Just bric-a-brac, on my word of honour."

Somebody objected that only the façade of the Cathedral had been damaged and that the Parliament had scarcely suffered at all.

"But it's burning, what are you talking about? I was there myself, and even whistled in the chamber. The fascist committee had its headquarters there. All gone to blazes

now!" the Captain, who loved to see destruction, argued emphatically, trying to convince his hearers. "The Palace is a complete wreck. I don't know the one you have in mind. The Belvedere is eighty per cent scrap, I lay a wager. Schönbrunn, the one on the outskirts of the city, is almost intact, only one of the wings is wrecked."

That Captain knew everything. She decided not to lose contact with him.

"Let's go and see St. Stephen's in the morning, eh?"

"Yes, why not? It's right by here. I've been everywhere already."

At this point a fierce argument arose between the Intelligence Officer and the Procurator. The Procurator asserted that the decisive battle was not being fought here, but on the sector occupied by Korolenko's Division (where Alexandra Ivanovna had been that morning), while the Intelligence Officer claimed that when Golyshev hoisted the Soviet Flag over the Parliament, that would signify that the battle was over.

Suddenly butting into the argument, Alexandra Ivanovna said that one of Korolenko's regiments would that night make a dash through the city's underground tunnels.

"A typical Voropayev operation," laughed the Captain who liked to see destruction.

"By the way, where is Voropayev? We hear nothing of him," enquired the Procurator.

"In the Crimea," said Goreva, blushing. She did not want to confess that she had not heard from him for a long time. "He is building himself a house, intends to go in for farming, and delivers lectures at kolkhozes."

"Voropayev going in for farming! It can't be!" exclaimed the Procurator, peering at Goreva in wonder. "And have you known Colonel Voropayev long?" he enquired suspiciously.

She did not know what to answer and blushed again.

"Alexandra Ivanovna is an old friend of Voropayev's," said Golyshev. "To tell you the honest truth, we have said lots of times among ourselves that it was high time Voropayev and Goreva got married."

The Procurator smiled in an embarrassed way, shrugged his shoulders, looked at Alexandra Ivanovna much more kindly, but said nothing.

* * *

Next morning she got up before dawn, while Golyshev slept, and accompanied by a despatch carrier went to the regimental dressing station that had been fixed up in a half-wrecked shop that bore the sign: "Toy Clinic." This strange name surprised her.

Actually it was just a workshop for repairing toys, but it was got up like a hospital. Dolls with bandaged heads, with splints on broken legs fastened in conformity with all the rules of surgery, and with stitched up abdomens, lay on stretchers, on suspension beds, in ambulance carts and in the cabins of ambulance aircraft.

Admiringly, she inspected this ingeniously devised toy hospital with its tiny dentist's chairs, operating tables and minute hot-water bottles, and did not cease to wonder at the ingenuity of the owner who had converted even such a stern art as surgery into an amusement for children.

The regimental dressing station was almost deserted. Two lightly-wounded men with bandaged legs were playing draughts, while a third, with an injured jaw, was with concentrated attention winding up a toy ambulance car, from which stretcher-bearers jumped to the sound of a siren.

The window of the "Toy Clinic" faced a small garden planted with old lime trees. Several nurses and mothers with infants in prams were sitting in the garden on low, folding stools. Evidently they had just left a bomb shelter and were waiting impatiently for the sun to rise. Some older children were playing with yellow sand that looked like cane sugar and had evidently been laid there in the autumn.

Closely hemmed in by houses, this garden resembled a large through courtyard. The remains of a German machine gun and a heap of cast-off German SS uniforms, connected the garden with the great events of the day.

On seeing the children Alexandra Ivanovna was at once prompted to enquire whether they needed any assistance, but before she managed to go out to them two smoking field kitchens rolled into the garden with a terrific clatter. From one of them the soup was spouting in the funniest fashion from bullet holes in the boiler. The cook, a short, bandy-legged fellow wearing a soiled cook's cap and a tommy gun hanging from his neck jumped down and began to stop up the holes with bread, while the driver hurriedly drew a

mouth organ from his bosom and began to play a Strauss waltz, hopelessly out of tune. Evidently the other kitchen was undamaged, for its crew remained seated on the driver's box calmly but curiously watching the repairs being made to the first one.

As soon as they heard the familiar strains of their favourite music, the women, who had been dozing listlessly on their stools up till now, raised their heads and smiled, and the children stopped playing with the sand and hesitantly drew nearer to the mouth-organ player. At the same time several windows were opened. Surprised faces peeped into the garden. One of the women, leaving her pram in the care of her neighbour, got up, smoothed her crumpled frock and stepped towards the field kitchens.

Evidently it had not been the intention of the mouth-organ player to acquire fame by his music, for he soon put his instrument away and told the children to hurry and bring utensils in which to take the soup which, in spite of the desperate efforts of the cook, was still spouting from the boiler.

The woman who had left her pram had already reached the field kitchen. She placed her cupped hands under the stream of

soup and when they were full she raised them to the mouth of the boy nearest to her. The other children were already running back with toy buckets and pitchers, carefully cleaning out the sand.

Then the cook of the second kitchen called the children to him.

All this happened so quickly that by the time Goreva reached the garden it was already filled with children and adults begging for soup for sick persons lying somewhere in the basement.

The woman who had collected soup in her cupped hands now took command of the line, and scolding the children who were crowding round, drove those away who had brought exceedingly large utensils.

"Why don't you feed your own child?" enquired Goreva, pushing her way towards the woman.

"Oh, Madame, he is too small to eat. For the time being I eat for him."

"But I haven't seen you take any food."

"I will in a minute, Madame. Can I take even a single mouthful before these little martyrs have had some? A little will be left for me at the bottom of the boiler, no doubt."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Goreva, quite disconcerted, and forgetting that she could have ordered the cooks to line the mothers up, she began to do so herself, near the second kitchen, putting the more emaciated ones in front.

Meanwhile, the sky, which had been quiet since midnight, became animated. German assault planes opened fire on the city; about five blocks away a gun roared. The rattling echo of machine-gun bursts came from the neighbouring street.

"Cover! Take cover!" shouted the erstwhile mouth-organ player waving his ladle.

The crowd of children and adults scattered and vanished through basement windows and in the same instant a red, dotted line of tracer bullets lashed the garden. The cooks stood there with their necks craned seemingly as if they were calmly wondering whether they would be killed or not. But the danger passed.

"Schnell! . . . Schnell! . . . Else it'll be kaputt for us and kaputt for you!" they shouted merrily when the plane had disappeared behind the houses, and the people lined up again at the kitchens in their former order. But the brute who fired at the children came back again.

"Cover! . . . Look out, nippers!"

This time the plane dropped a small bomb and followed it up with machine-gun fire; but the cooks again remained at their kitchens and the mouth-organ player even took his instrument out and played a few bars of a Strauss waltz.

This greatly amused the children who cheered the player from the basement entrances, and leaving their cover at the signal "Schnell," they began to sing and hop about.

But the cook was obliged to play Strauss several times more before the kitchen boilers were emptied, and each time his utter contempt for danger sent the children into transports of joy. They danced around the empty kitchens and for a long time afterwards raised their thin little arms in greeting to the cooks, waved their berets to them and clapped their hands.

The adults were no less moved than the children. They crowded round Goreva and bombarded her with questions. They were all humble folk—commercial clerks, shop assistants and musicians. They wanted in one bite to get all the news of the world, but mainly, they wanted to get at least a hint of what the future held out for them.

"You will live as you lived before the war," Goreva told them. "Austria will be a free country," but she saw that they did not believe her.

"If it is true that the Americans are hurrying to form a junction with the Russians and that the English are following on their heels, how will Austria become what she was before? The English never voluntarily leave a place even if they got into it by chance," said a musician who wore a well-made fashionable overcoat.

"Why don't you people hang out your national flag? Fighting has been going on for three days, but the city says nothing."

The crowd smiled, all one smile.

"Do you think it has already been captured from Hitler?"

"Of course."

The musician said, expressing the general opinion:

"It's nice to hoist your national flag, but painful to haul it down again."

"You won't have to do that."

"In that case there is no need to hurry. We will wait until we get special orders."

And everybody mutely agreed with him. Yes, there was no need to hurry to hang out flags.

A quarter of an hour later Goreva was saying to Major Golyshev whose condition that day caused her no anxiety whatever as the splinter had now been successfully extracted:

"I cannot understand the inertia of these Viennese. In small towns—I have seen it myself several times—the people helped our men to haul machine guns, carried wounded from under fire and excellently served as guides, but here in Vienna I see only apathetic people who appear to be afraid of, or indifferent to, everything."

"The temper is different in the working-class districts," answered Golyshev. "There they kiss and hug our men and weep on their shoulders. But here . . . of course. And besides, Vienna has been so starved, so terrorized by Hitler, so enervated by provocative rumours that it does not know what to do. And lastly, fighting is still going on. . . . But what a thieving lot some of them are!" he exclaimed in a tone of childish wonder. "You capture a fine mansion, and an hour later in they come: 'Permit us, Herr Major, to take our things.' Bitte, bitte! You push on further and capture another house. The same crowd turns up: 'Permit us, Herr Major. . . .' You sonofabitches,

you said that house over there was yours! 'No, that's our uncle's house, this one is ours.' You let them in and a minute later they are squabbling over the things, pulling them out of each other's hands, and you have to step in to part them." Suddenly, he said, without looking at Goreva, as if he were talking to himself: "It's a pity we will have to go away from here. How much blood we have shed for them, but they will never be able to arrange their lives properly.... Roll up our sleeves here and.... What things we could do here, eh? And if Alexei were here, Voropayev I mean!"

And then only did he look at her with the enquiring gaze of a stranger.

She understood that look and did not turn her tired, expressionless, lacklustre eyes away from Golyshev.

Her face, which had grown quite thin since the battle for Budapest, where she had last seen Golyshev, was not as beautiful as it had seemed to him then. It bore an almost physically palpable coating of despair which aged her fine, proud features.

One would say that she was now about forty years of age, although Golyshev remembered definitely that she had scarcely

turned thirty and that he himself had given her a birthday present when Voropayev was still with him. No hardships of life and war spoil a woman's face so much as spiritual loneliness.

Her black eyes, always bright and eager, about which Alexei used to say that they laugh even in sleep, were now shining with only one-third of their former brilliance as if they were being quenched in the depths of their darkened sockets, her lips were cracked, had grown thinner and drooped at the corners, and unaware of it herself, her chin trembled.

Her face looked like a deserted house in which everything was different from an inhabited one.

He felt extremely sorry for her, and not knowing what to say, he drew his pale hand from under his blanket and laid it in hers.

With the desperation of which only women are capable she suddenly enquired:

"Does he write to you?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"That he's starting something or other there, has got himself a house, a housekeeper,

kolkhozes, lectures.... I've got a feeling that he's having a hard time.... Doesn't he write to you?"

"Not a word."

"I can understand his mood," said Golyshev after a pause. "I hope you will not be offended, but I must tell you frankly, you have dropped out of his life a little. Am I right?"

She could not tell whether her face paled or became flushed at that moment, but she realized that this idle conversation was likely to be of vital importance to her. So she decided not to retreat, not to turn it off with a jest, but to go straight at it.

"Yes, he seems to have forgotten my existence, he hasn't written to me for a long time, he is trying to make me forget him and to leave him in peace. But I can't. I love him. He is so much mine that I am not angry with him, and I am not afraid that he will be unfaithful to me. I only feel very much ashamed that I am now alone. But as soon as I am free, believe me, he will not escape me," and involuntarily she laughed as she pictured herself chasing Voropayev.

Golyshev listened attentively, gazed at her sceptically but did not interrupt her.

"You say that he has written to you about some housekeeper.... Believe me, that does not hurt me. Voropayev has only one person that is dear to him, and I am the one. He loves me; and he needs me."

Golyshev remained silent.

"At all events, you can ask him about me...."

"That's exactly what I want to do. Permit me to telephone you when I get a reply."

"Certainly," she said, trying to suppress her emotion. "I too would very much like to know...."

"I am doing it for your sake."

"Thanks. Now I will ask you something, but give me an honest answer. Do you think he is much estranged from me, that I am very ... that I am not a good match for him?"

"What can I say?... Yes, perhaps, at present, you are not a good match. When a man is kicked out of his groove, he is all knocked out, feelings too. I wonder whether you understand me. Take Romeo and Juliet. That is not the truth, but a falsehood, although a very noble and romantic one. Things don't happen like that in real life; life is sterner and simpler. Conditions of life play no

less important a role in love than sentiment. Sometimes you love and strive, but it is unattainable, there is no road to that love. If you look at love not as a caprice, but as an enrichment of the soul...."

"Well, what then?"

"Well then, it happens that it doesn't work out."

"Oh, Golyshev, you are a philosopher! It doesn't suit you. See how you are arguing. As a Major, say, you fall in love with me, but when you become a General you will cease to love me. Isn't that so? Conditions will be different, what?"

"You are not very far from the truth. I don't quite know how to express it, but I am convinced I am right. When a man develops, everything in him develops, including his conception of love and duty, his demands on himself and on other people...."

"Well?"

"Wait, don't rush me.... And when a man is sick, when his old life is wrecked and his new one has not yet been built, he himself is a wreck, all covered with lime and dust, and his feelings and hopes are in that state too... and at such a time it is sometimes better for a man to be alone."

"What you say is all very foggy. I had better wait for a letter from Alexei, perhaps he will explain it more smoothly. . . ."

And she went out feeling that she had been subjected to torture which she had survived with difficulty.

In the car she sat not with the driver, but in the back seat, so that he should not see the contortions of her face as she strove to suppress her tears.

"Good God, why am I not a suitable match for him?" she asked herself, pondering over what Golyshev had said. "Can he have ceased to love me only because he is now a sick man? What has happened, what?. . ."

* * *

Loneliness affected her like the grippe.

Her's had been a joyless childhood. Her mother died when she herself was just over a year old and she was brought up by her father. She had no joyful recollections of childhood —neither plays, nor circuses, nor New Year Fir Trees, nor cinemas, nor even anything sweet.

If she ever did dream about the distant past it was always something sad, and usually the same thing: she is reading a book in a silent, uncomfortable room waiting for her

father. She had spent all her childhood waiting for her father and had begun to feel young only when she ceased to wait for him. And it was strange that she had to grow up and become independent only to return to the loneliness of her childhood and again wait for somebody, not daring to look round.

As a girl she had been good-looking and knew it, and had been awfully hurt because hardly anyone had courted her. Once a fellow student at the institute explained it to her in this way:

"Good-looking girls are capricious, capricious and exacting. And besides," he had added with a laugh, "all the good-looking girls are already hitched up with somebody. That's a law."

She had very much wanted to tell him that she was not hitched up with anybody, that she was not capricious and, perhaps, no more exacting than her girl friends who burdened themselves with love affairs as the most important affairs of their consciences, but she had restrained herself.

Incidentally, in moments of introspection she had confessed to herself that she was somewhat dry, could not get on well with

people, and probably created the impression of being proud and stuck-up, although she could reproach herself only for being unsociable.

She had liked very many young men and, as far as she could understand, many liked her, but in no case had friendship grown into intimacy.

Talk about flowers and the moon, and enigmatic arguments about the affinity of souls had caused her to blush for the person talking. She could never understand why people resorted to banalities when having good and kind objects in view.

She had been obliged to confess that she had not yet met the man whom she could seriously love and in all probability would now never meet him—a sweetheart of thirty was not, after all, such a precious find. And so she had given herself up entirely to her profession. A splendid future had been prophesied for her. Future? Without happiness?

With Voropayev things had been entirely different. For one thing, he had not courted her, but with her had experienced what he had never experienced before he had met her. He in the most unaffected way had come to

her with his favourite books, his squabbles and troubles. He had sent his friends to her to put them up for a night, had shared her worries concerning her seriously sick patients and had interested himself in her hospital affairs as if they had been his own. And she, the dry, proud, touch-me-not, the "stone-carved flower," reached the point where she had telephoned him at Corps Headquarters inviting him to visit her, or had herself gone to his Political Department dugout and there, struggling to keep her weary eyes open, had listened to his stories about some sort of conferences of Political Officers, or about soldiers' chanties that he was collecting, and then, leaning over the desk, had fallen asleep to the sound of telephone buzzers, the creaking of plywood doors warped by the heat, and of his hoarse, angry, baritone voice which by the morning sank to a deep bass.

What must a model wife be able to do? Cook? Interest herself in her husband's affairs? It so happened that Goreva could do very little in this line. She was a bad housekeeper, did not sing, did not play the piano, did not paint and did not discuss literature, although she had read a great deal and well

remembered what she had read. Her patients loved her, her comrades respected her, her women friends were a little afraid of her and did not keep with her long. She even dressed stealthily, as it were; nobody knew where she had her dresses made, or what tastes she had, but she was always better dressed than others, although she did not go in for the fashions.

"No doubt I am already an old maid," she now reflected. She had wanted to discuss this with Golyshev, but he had been in such an angry and resentful mood that day that she had given him one frightened glance and had turned her head away with relief.

"What would Alexei do were he in my place? If women were to choose husbands with the same frank courage with which men chose their partners in life, people would be twice as happy as they are now."

* * *

During the days Goreva had been away from the "army," the field administration was removed from the distant suburb to the south side of the city, and as soon as she reappeared among her fellow officers they fixed her up in a charming little detached house that

belonged to a rich commercial traveller in Thomas Münzer Street.

It was a four-roomed house and bore the poetic name "Marquitta." Of course, it was supposed to sound very imposing: "Vienna, 10 Thomas-Münzer-Gasse, Villa 'Marquitta'." It had been bought on the hire purchase, like a Singer's sewing machine, or an Oppel-Kadett.

The plot was a small one, cramped and no use for keeping animals. You could get a rabbit hutch into it somehow, but there was absolutely no room for a pigsty. It had a nice garden planted with roses, lilac and some trees unknown in our country that bore fluffy, pinkish-violet flowers. The façade of "Marquitta," like those of all the other detached houses in this district, was covered with a thin, green veil of ivy. The streets in this district were very narrow, and there was no place for parking cars. The people who resided here had not yet risen to the level of car owners.

On returning from Golyshev, Alexandra Ivanovna went to Dr. Liebersmul's "hospital" and worked there for about four hours. Then she went to Korolenko's Divisional Headquarters to enquire how the "underground dash" had gone off and was not in the least

surprised to learn that it had been a brilliant success.

Then, in the afternoon, she performed operations at the army hospital until she was almost forcibly carried out of the operating room and sent in the company of a feldsher to the quarters that had been assigned to her.

Goreva felt sad after her talk with Golyshev, sad and depressed.

She ascended to the upper floor and lay down on a tiny couch in one of the upper rooms that had been assigned to her in "Marquitta."

This was a sort of study attached to the bedroom. The low furniture was cheap, but pretty. A Viennese, imitation Persian carpet was spread on the floor. The walls were hung with water colours, by Polish and Rumanian artists for some reason, not bad ones, but not so good as to deserve journeying to Vienna. The sunset-coloured curtains hung low to the floor, like the trains of old-fashioned dresses. The lamp shades made of oiled cardboard looked like parchment.

The incessant rumble of artillery caused a faint trembling of the cracked window-panes, and this created a sort of frontlike cosiness.

She took a pile of beautifully illustrated albums of Vienna, Budapest, Rome and Venice from the bookcase and abstractedly turned the pages while her mind was engaged with something else.

The views of Budapest surprised her particularly. The photographs and drawings presented a picture of a smart, beautiful city that she had not seen, although she had been in Budapest for about a month. True, the city had been frightfully battered, but even the districts that had suffered no damage had not impressed her so much as did these views. Or Vienna. She looked at the views of Graben and the Ring, the most magnificent streets of the beautiful Austrian capital, and recalled what she had seen on her way to Golyshev. The present Vienna was quite a different city—dull, cramped and dirty. "I suppose it's the people who make a city beautiful," she mournfully reflected, and pushing the albums aside became absorbed with her own thoughts.

Up till now she had been convinced that she had known Voropayev through and through, so to speak. Sometimes she had even thought that she knew him better than he knew himself.

She knew that, in spite of his fine and flexible mind, his wide education and immense experience in life, Alexei Voropayev was in many things an impractical child, that notwithstanding his devilish energy and fortitude he was sometimes lazy and listless, that his ardent and ever-bubbling optimism sometimes gave way to apathy, to loss of confidence in his strength, and that it would be the duty of his wife constantly to sustain in him the sacred fire of self-confidence. She knew all about Voropayev that one could know about a dear one, she loved him such as he was and knew that she needed him, because he, in some way, supplemented and enriched her.

But now it turned out that she did not know Voropayev, that his soul was still a mystery to her.

. . . The flimsy staircase with the orange-coloured plastics banister creaked with the weight of somebody's footsteps. There was a soft, cautious knock at the door.

"Come in!" She instinctively put her hand to her "Walter."

An elderly man in a long, greenish coat, which she thought old-fashioned, entered.

"Please excuse me, I am the owner of this villa, Herr Peter Altman" (without the

least embarrassment he introduced himself not simply as Altman, but as Herr Peter Altman). "Oh, it is cold here, Madame!... Dear oh, dear, oh dear!... I'll give orders at once, Madame.... No, what am I saying? I mean, I shall bring you a basket of coal at once. But a thousand pardons, Madame ... if you will permit me, I will put the light out for a moment and draw the curtains, something, for which I cannot find a name, disturbs me.... May I?"

And without waiting for permission he put the light out, stepped to the window and drew the heavy curtains.

In the distance, in the spaces between tall houses the beams of "Katyushas" soared swiftly into the sky in low, soft, barely perceptible arcs.

"That's a Katyusha," she said without explaining.

"Ah, that's what it is!... Katyush ... Yes, yes, yes!... Katyush!... Very striking and, they say, terrible, is that right?" He had the curtains drawn now.

"Everybody says they are very terrible," Goreva answered drily.

"Madame is travelling?" he enquired, politely nodding towards the albums, and with

an easy motion of his foot he drew towards himself a low padded stool on hollow metal runners and squatted in anticipation of an invitation to sit down.

"Please sit down," she said in a markedly forced tone, and he sat down at once.

"You are travelling?" he repeated. "I have travelled a great deal, I have seen much, lived much, something to remember," he went on as if promising her a lot of good things. "You haven't been to Italy yet, have you?" he enquired politely.

"Not yet," she answered.

"How is that?"

"I have time. My time is my own now."

"Oh yes, now, of course."

He paused and looked round the room as if expecting it to have changed after it had been occupied by a Soviet woman.

"You will feel all right here," he said emphatically. "You will not be sorry for having put up with the Altmans. God grant that we retain pleasant recollections of you. We have coal, but we have nobody to carry it, but I suppose die Herrin Doktor, has an orderly. Of course, I guessed that. Then it will be quite a simple matter. Breakfast in the morning? No? Warm water to wash with?

Very good. Tea in the evening? But the main thing, Madame, is association with us. You will have a lot of work to do among us. Oh, quite a lot. And no easy work. Oh, no! . . ."

That evening, much as she begged to be excused, she was obliged to go down to the Altmans. Frau Altman, scented, and surprisingly young, very coquettishly dressed in a simple cotton frock, greeted her with such gushing joy that one would have thought she was taking Goreva for an old friend. She kept biting her lower lip as if expecting the Russian woman to say something shocking. When Alexandra Ivanovna smiled, the lady of the house raised her eyebrows and opened wide her young, playful eyes as if inviting her to laugh. Later her daughter came in; she had been in the garret watching the exploding bombs and the fires. She sat down at the table and opened a thick, oilcloth-covered exercise book.

"We will write down what you say," said Peter Altman to please the guest. "Thoughts, advice and information generally. It will be our book of life."

Alexandra Ivanovna now regretted that she had revealed knowledge of the language.

How easy it was for those of our people who knew only their native tongue—nothing could be expected of them. On the other hand, she did want to tell these people a lot and learn even more from them.

"Very well, but on this condition: absolute frankness. I will put questions to you too."

Frau Altman bit her lip and opened her eyes so wide that her brows reached the middle of her forehead.

"Oh, that's quite fair," Peter Altman agreed at once. "We will put questions to you and you will answer them, and then you will put questions to us.... Oh, that's quite fair! ... What do you think?"

His wife hastened to agree. She took up her knitting, her daughter took up a pencil and Herr Altman said with a smile:

"Well, I'll start with the simplest of questions. How are people in the world living?"

"That's a long story," answered Goreva, smiling in spite of herself. "The world is very big, and there are lots of people in it. I don't know what interests you particularly."

"Better let me ask," the lady of the house hastened to intervene. "Tell us, what are

people wearing now in Paris, London, and across the ocean?"

"What are they wearing?" Goreva smiled. She had not had occasion to think of such things for a long time.

"You are so friendly with those Entente people. You must have a lot of things, of course—fashions and butter! Oh that Hitler! . . . Before the Anschluss the rate of our Austrian schilling was so steady. . . ."

"Never mind, let's take a brighter view of life," sighed Herr Altman. "Let's start with the minor news."

Goreva, however, was determined not to give way and tried hard to recall her "European" impressions.

"Do you know, I was surprised in Rumania by the large number of well-dressed women I saw there," she began bravely. "But I was no less surprised in Hungary to see the awful number of women who wore men's coats and trousers."

"Men's trousers!" exclaimed Frau Altman, casting a hurried glance at her daughter as if wondering whether such conversation would not be dangerous for her youthful ears.

Herr Altman was less careful in her presence.

"But don't you know, Madame Alexandrine? Szalasi introduced that fashion among them, the scoundrel! That fellow is a . . . like Rĕmus.... Have you heard the story?... 'What is your wife's name? His name is Colonel Gaston.' "

His daughter burst out laughing.

Goreva went on gravely to relate:

"Happily, this was the case only in the towns. In the Magyar villages you frequently meet women so fat that you cannot help laughing."

"Why?" enquired Frau Altman.

"Because of the peculiar petticoats they wear under their skirts. It is the fashion in Hungary to appear broad-hipped."

"Is that so? I am surprised!"

"But in Vienna, I hope, Madame Alexandrine, your eyes will rest from everything that is exaggerated by seeing the graceful figures of our women," said Herr Altman, screwing up his eyes and looking at his lean wife, "at their simple but well-made clothes and—what is most important, let me tell you—their simple hairdress."

"What has attracted my attention in Vienna most are people's feet. In Rumania, you know, all the women wear shoes with very

thick cork soles. The Hungarian women are roughshod, like the men. But here, in Vienna, the women wear shoes with medium heels and this makes their feet look so poetic that I am ready to weep for shame over my chrome leather top boots, although they were made by a General's bootmaker and would no doubt look very nice on a man's feet...."

"You will have a pair of shoes like that, Madame Alexandrine, that can be easily arranged."

"Don't interrupt, Papa, Madame has something more to say."

"No, no, nothing particular. To tell the truth, what did astonish me at first in Vienna was the passion for wearing shorts outdoors. Even now I can't get accustomed to seeing elderly women in woolen pull-overs, blue moleskin shorts, and a rucksack on their backs.... In our country, the boldest woman would not dare go to the Opera barelegged, but here nobody seems to mind."

"That is our peculiar Vienna freedom."

"A pity it applies only to clothes."

The Altmans looked surprised.

"I am not mistaken, am I, Herr Altman?"

"Ha! Yes, a little. I have noticed that

while you Soviet people have extraordinarily keen eyes and retentive memories, you have one weakness, I hope you won't mind my saying so, you are inclined to reduce everything to a type, to generalize, as it were. Am I right? It is a great failing."

Herr Peter Altman coughed and glanced at the clock.

"Humph! It's quite late. You have work to do, haven't you, Madame Alexandrine? We are robbing you of your rest, eh? Well, we'll see you in the morning!"

The daughter jotted something in the exercise book and Goreva retired to her room, wondering what she would say in the morning to these people who were not seriously interested in anything. They talked to her as if she were a tourist who had idly travelled through several countries and was in possession of news which they had not heard.

* * *

Goreva's relations with the Altmans developed parallel with the development of the battle for Vienna. If rumours reached the Altmans that the Germans were sending up reinforcements, they did not invite her to tea,

or if they did, they hastened to cheer her by saying:

"If anything should happen, Madame, we will say that you treated us well. What do you say to that, eh? Don't worry, we'll put in a good word for you."

But at last the Altmans became permanently polite and attentive, for Vienna had been completely liberated from the Germans and the Red Army had moved a long way westward.

One day Goreva telephoned General Korolenko and asked if she could have a jeep for a whole day.

"If to ride with me, you can have it for eternity," the General answered with polite jocularity, and about a half an hour later a brand-new Oppel-Kapitän rolled up to the door of the Villa "Marquitta."

Goreva took Frau Altman and her daughter for a ride round the city to see the surviving sights of Vienna. It was the end of April and some of the trees were already in bloom. But the streets still smelt of smoke and corpses, although the gardeners in the boulevards were already planting in the flower beds some kind of carefully-tended plants wrapped in coloured bast-matting. Organ-

grinders, all to a man resembling the late Emperor Franz-Joseph, were grinding out music in the parks. Half-blind parrots with faded feathers were preening themselves on the organs, coughing significantly every now and again like drunkards.

They decided to follow a route they had drawn up the evening before: first to Schönbrunn and, if time permitted, to take a look at Beethoven's house, where he composed his Eroica Symphony. Frau Altman had a plan of her own, however. She dreamed of showing Goreva the palaces of Vienna, being of the opinion that palaces are more easily remembered than music.

"What pleasure is there in looking at a house, even if it is Beethoven's, say? Really, it's like looking at a jewel case with the jewels gone."

Goreva categorically refused to agree with Frau Altman, although she was indeed keen on seeing the magnificent sculptures of old, imperial Vienna. But to yield to her on this point meant yielding to the rest of her plan, and Frau Altman was yearning to look in at the "Ku-ku" night club where, she said, she had not been for a long time, and to drink a glass of wine at "The Three

Hussars," which, she averred, shutting her eyes mysteriously, was the last of the Strauss taverns.

She was a typical Viennese: yearning to go on the spree and frankly saying so, but not daring to do so.

Goreva succeeded in having her own way, and they drove to Schönbrunn.

The palace was beautiful. On the outside it looked no worse than those at Tsarskoye Selo, but the furnishing was markedly poorer. The park, however, was magnificent. Frau Altman wept when she saw that part of the palace had been damaged by bombs, but became pacified at once when she learned that they had been American bombs. She took Goreva to see Maria Theresa's boudoirs, bedrooms and toilets, and rapidly and knowingly initiated her to all the alcove exploits of the Austrian dynasty during the period of two centuries. Her daughter, who appeared to be no less informed, corrected her whenever she erred.

In the room where Napoleon had lived when he was in Vienna, and where his son, the Duke of Reichstadt, died, Frau Altman expressed regret that the furniture had been removed, and that they were unable to see

Napoleon's famous bed and the pot that had stood under it.

"It was such a pretty little thing, like a marmalade bowl," she said, laughing and biting her lip.

The box trees in the park were clipped in the most fantastic fashion, and everywhere there were benches with water tricks and "water machinations"—Aeolian harps, waterfalls with shepherd pipes that at one time had filled the park with weird, fabulous sounds. Incidentally, none of the Aeolian harps were working, so Goreva had to take Frau Altman's word for it.

Frau Altman caught hold of a young, fair-bearded, palace guide whom she respectfully addressed as "Doctor," and this pale, terrified-looking "Doctor" took them to the old imperial stables where the famous collection of the coaches of the entire Hapsburg dynasty was housed. Some of the coaches looked more comfortable than automobiles, although they dated back to the time of Suvorov.

"Tell me, Herr Doctor, is it likely that our Suvorov stayed in this palace?" Goreva enquired.

"Suvorov? Pardon me, but I have never heard the name."

"Or Kutuzov?"

"Kutuzov? What year?"

"He was in command of the combined Russo-Austrian army that fought Napoleon in 1805."

"Kutuzov in command of the combined Russo-Austrian army?" The Doctor and Frau Altman glanced at each other enquiringly. "Improbable, Madame. But I am not a military man. I am entirely a civilian, an expert on this park."

Frau Altman also put a word in.

"Evidently, Madame Alexandrine is not quite well informed. A Russian General fought for us? I have never heard of such a thing, never! I think you had better keep to your speciality, Doctor."

This was exactly what the Doctor was waiting for.

"A garden, meine Herrinen," he began with a painful smile, "is, as you know, the symbol of happiness. Paradise was a garden. All great men operated in gardens. Plato and the Peripatetics discoursed to their pupils under the shade of plane trees. Epicurus also taught in a garden. And lastly, the Greek gods, as you know, lived exclusively in gardens, the so-called Elysian fields. It is in

gardens, also, meine Herrinen, that love has proceeded since the earliest days of antiquity. The Romans, after their eastern campaigns, were the first to lay out pleasure gardens in Italy. The Armenian gardeners taught their Roman colleagues the art of clipping trees and lent them the shape of voluptuous maidens."

Beads of perspiration broke out on the "Doctor's" brow.

He mopped his forehead with a small, not over clean, handkerchief and proceeded to discourse on the gardens of the Roman Caesars.

"Why are you telling us all this?" Goreva enquired, scarcely able to believe that the "Doctor" was not a charlatan.

Frau Altman intervened.

"He is a very capable young scientist, Madame Alexandrine. His drawings are really charming, but Annette is with us.... Would you mind if I invited the Doctor to visit us one day?"

Goreva merely shrugged her shoulders.

They got into the car and drove on further. Palaces flashed past as though on a screen. Then the mansions of celebrities. On that hectic day they visited the eleven

Beethoven apartments known to Frau Altman out of the thirty that existed.

"When we are in Baden I will show you five other Beethoven apartments," she graciously promised.

She also wanted to show Goreva the clock museum where there were no less than ten thousand exhibits, including a huge camp alarm clock on wheels that had belonged to a famous Archduke, and with which he is alleged to have roused his camp before a battle.

"There was no need to rouse the Austro-Hungarian army. It was always up in time to run away before the battle started," observed Goreva. Frau Altman took up the challenge.

"True, we lost battles, Madame Alexandrine, but we won wars that we never waged," she answered proudly, clicking her tongue.

Then she twittered something about Vienna being a separate world.

"Now tell me honestly, isn't this the most beautiful city in Europe?"

"Personally, I much prefer Riga, Vilnius, Lvov and Leningrad. Paris is very nice."

"Oh, but it is a ruin. Do you know, the English burnt it, down to the last brick!"

"Yes, yes, that's so," said Annette in confirmation. "A friend of Papa's wrote to him about it. The Champs d'Elysée has been completely levelled. Isn't that awful?"

"It is not true. Paris is intact," said Goreva reassuringly.

But Frau Altman would not yield.

"Let him take us to Prater and I will hear what you say then."

Unfortunately, they could not inspect that famous Vienna park for popular galas as it had not yet been cleared of mines. They drove out of town to the Vienna Woods. They certainly looked beautiful, but nothing to go into raptures about. The environs of Leningrad are more magnificent. And what about the old parks in South Ukraine?

Goreva returned disappointed. How she had dreamed about this Europe! It was evidently true that the chief thing about a city is not its architecture, but its crowds. A deserted, depopulated city is always ugly and dreary.

Suddenly she remembered: "Why, Bakunin was here! Here, in Vienna, Lenin lived!"

And instead of searching for the old bricks of the house in which Lenin had lived she

had been driving about the streets with that silly woman!

Oh, if Voropayev were here! What an awful dressing down he would have given her!

That night another disappointment awaited her. Golyshev sent her the last letter he had received from Voropayev. He had received it a long time ago, but was reluctant to tell her about it when he saw her.

* * *

"I am living a hard life, but a gay one," wrote Voropayev, "and for the time being I have no intention of changing it for any other kind. At the present time, people like me ought not to take shelter in transient, minor affairs. It is their duty to be in the forward lines. You ask me how I am living. To be quite honest with you, dear boy, I can't tell myself what is organizing itself around me. Speaking formally, I am not living alone. I have with me a certain Elena Petrovna Zhurina with a daughter and mother, and I have a four-roomed house, a cat, a dog and a little pig.

"I can't say definitely yet whether this is a farm or a family, but I think I want it to be the latter.

"As regards Alexandra Ivanovna Goreva who has played a big part in my life, I have decided that I must not now be a restriction to her. She deserves happiness, and that I cannot give her; that is why I do not even write to her so as not to upset her needlessly.

"Even when I was young I could not become intimate for the sake of momentary pleasure. To me, love is an event that decides the course of one's life, like joining the Party, and now, as before—to take a woman's life and give her my own in exchange, to make one big life out of two little ones, is the only course that I can conceive of.

"But, as you know, I am not in favour of sex equality in family life. I believe that the man must be the chief in the home, that he must be the senior. At one time I thought I could become such a chief for Goreva, but that has passed. A husband who needs a nurse, massaging, cupping, fomentations, a husband who is pitiful, who cannot be loved without his temperature and blood pressure being taken into consideration—conjure up this mournful picture and you will understand why Goreva flashed past me like the Azores.

"I grip your paw. Remember, if you are crippled, you can be sure of a bed next to mine for the rest of your life. But put in a bit of fighting for me.

Yours,

Alexei Voropayev."

* * *

Alexandra Ivanovna switched on the light and sat down at the table with the intention of writing at once to this woman Zhurina in order to get to the bottom of what was happening in Voropayev's life.

"This is a sort of self-martyrdom," she mused, sitting over the letter she had started and shivering from the raw air of the room that had now grown cold. "Downright utter nonsense!"

At that moment she not only did not love but did not even respect Voropayev.

She wrote to him:

"Dear friend,

"You are cruel, and nothing can justify your cruelty. Even if you have ceased to love and respect me you have no right to desert me in this craven manner.

"How unlike this is of you as I knew you!

"Sometimes it seems to me that part of your heart was torn away together with your leg. Has that ever occurred to you?

"Tell me please, who is this Golyshev, and why does he occupy such a strangely more important place in your heart than I do that you boyishly blurt out to him that I am a stranger to you? But that is not true, Alexei! You have simply forgotten what I have been to you; and if Golyshev did not know this and asked you to explain, lots of people can tell you that your answer is incorrect, for they know what we have been to each other.

"Sometimes I think you have gone out of your mind, and this consoles me somewhat, for it is better that you should be a lunatic rather than a cad.

"What have I done to deserve this, Alyosha?

"Believe me, I would have stopped bothering you long ago—I am a proud woman, as you know—if I could believe that you have ceased to love me. But I know, I am convinced, that we need each other very much, and it is sad and painful to me to have

to go to you through unnecessary vexation and humiliation as you are making me do. But no, keep calm, I will not go to you. I will stop searching for you, knowing that you hate friends who force themselves upon you.

A. G."

CHAPTER NINE

Voropayev's life had never been so intense and extravagant as it was at this time. Neither at the Academy nor even at the front did he ever live so richly, did he spend his enormous stock of living experience so recklessly and with so little regret.

Nowhere, perhaps, had he felt that people needed him so strongly as he felt it here.

He lectured on the history of the Party at the Party School that he himself had organized; he helped the librarian to organize readers' conferences; he gave Yuri Podnebesko lessons twice a week to prepare him for the vocational school; and he himself attended as a student a class for vegetable gardeners at the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz, in the area of which his and Sophia Ivanovna's house was situated, and took part in heated debates on how to obtain two potato crops a year by Anashin's method, and two tomato crops by Dergach's method.

Handwritten posters in crooked script with the announcements: "The Situation at the Fronts—Lecture by Voropayev," "The Soviet Intelligentsia During the Patriotic War—Lecture by Voropayev," "The Prospects of Peace —Lecture by Voropayev" followed one another so often that they began to be regarded as a necessary decoration of the streets.

Lena no longer worked for Korytov; she was busy in the garden preparing for the planting, clearing up the house and cooking the food.

The neighbours regarded her as Voropayev's wife, and when they asked her: "Is your man at home?" she would answer blushing:

"Yes. Preparing for a lecture."

Having watched and grown accustomed to Voropayev, she now loved him with that shy and mute love that is so characteristic of the Russian woman, and in which passion is assigned a separate place. She longed to be worthy of Voropayev and found pleasure in going among people with him, in hearing him speak, in learning from him and in knowing that her welfare depended upon him. It gave her immense pleasure to see him fondling Tanya, to hear his voice as often as possible and to gaze into his face, now no longer

sallow and waxen, but sunburnt and brown, and into his clever and all-understanding eyes.

Sometimes she yearned to kiss him, but embarrassed by this, as she thought, "unbecoming" and scarcely respectable desire, she at once feverishly plunged into some occupation or other and forgot about kisses. She considered that kissing and all that sort of thing had passed away for her. All these things happen when you are young, and later they seem to cease to be essential.

Had she more spare time, perhaps she would have pondered over this problem more, but happily, she had no spare time at all.

As spring drew nearer the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz invited her to help to organize a vegetable garden brigade. She was as proud of this as if she had received an award and, surreptitiously reading Voropayev's notes when he was away, she studied points on vegetable growing and soil preparation. Among these notes she found several letters from Goreva and Golyshev, which disturbed her peace of mind for quite a long while, but she dared not confess her doubts to Voropayev and only plunged more ardently into her work. One day Voropayev was amazed to read in the local newspaper a short article signed by

Natalya Podnebesko of the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz, Anna Stupina of the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz and Elena Zhurina of the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz, proposing a bold plan—to lay out gardens in school grounds.

Those who have not felt the joy of winning public approbation will fail to appreciate the inspiration that overcame Lena. She seemed to belong no longer to herself and to Voropayev, but to have yielded to a power that was stronger than he or her family. And this new power pushed her forward so persistently that she now unhesitatingly entered into argument with Alexei Veniaminovich, and even spoke up in opposition to him when she did not agree with him.

Sophia Ivanovna merely coughed gloomily when she heard Lena speak in this way and could scarcely believe that this was her daughter who had formerly been so quiet, uncomplaining, reticent, and indifferent to everything.

And so the house remained unrepaired, and the orchard was not put to rights.

Things reached such a pitch that even the pup ran away. Fine housekeepers to be sure!

Even Sophia Ivanovna now refused to have anything to do with the house—she was

now entirely absorbed in the work of collecting wild plants.

"What am I, your domestic servant?" she growled at Voropayev when he reminded her of her talk in the winter about getting a cow. "I've started on this work, shall I drop it now? A nice thing, to be sure! The people entrusted me with this job and you want me.... No, no, stop talking about it!" she said, waving her hands as if the idea of making the house pay had been Voropayev's and not hers.

And so March and the beginning of April passed.

The corps in which Voropayev had served, judging by the Orders of the Day of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, was marching at the head of events on the Third Ukrainian Front. On April 1, 2 and 4, salutes were fired in its honour. "Is she alive there?"

In the beginning of April the Allies crossed the Rhine along the whole stretch from Emmerich to Strasbourg, and the Red Army was seventy kilometres from Berlin.

Harris' name appeared in the newspaper. He wrote that nowhere were the Americans and British meeting with organized resistance.

Was this the end of the war or a manoeuvre? One could also expect a manoeuvre.

But on April 13, the Soviet Flag flew over Vienna. The capture of Vienna, in which his Fourth Guards distinguished itself, particularly excited Voropayev.

"They are having a grand time there, of course," he reflected enviously. "They ought to be here and we'd see how they'd like it," but catching himself arguing in the same way as Korytov, he became angry with himself.

On April 27, the day on which the San Francisco Conference was opened, Korytov, through the Director of the Organization Department, ordered Voropayev to go to the kolkhozes to conduct the May Day celebrations instead of lecturing at the House of Culture as had been previously arranged.

On the thirtieth he conducted May Day eve meetings at the *Mikoyan* Kolkhoz of which Gorodtsov was now chairman, then at the *Pervomaisky,* and arrived at the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz late at night when the festival was in full swing.

They got up from the table after three in the morning and when he woke up at Tsimbal's house it was already two in the afternoon.

Displeased with himself, he went into the yard in front of Tsimbal's house where he had lain in the winter. He went out and stood transfixed. The sea rose up to meet him and stopped midway in the sky.

The mountains were a brilliant green. From them was wafted the dry smell of pine, as if something were burning far away in the woods; and to meet this, from the sea, came like a wave, salty to the taste and moist to the touch, the smell of the warmed waves, the smell of sand and seaweed. The sun united the two currents and the air began to sing like boiling water. It sang, quivering and wriggling in slow, circling movements as if in a dance, and its vitalizing liquor grew thicker and stronger.

Not a bird, not a cloud was in the sky. An exceptionally solemn silence reigned, disturbed only by the chirping of the grasshoppers, so persistent and monotonous that it rang in the ears.

The spring which Voropayev had so long wanted to admire had already gone. He had really seen it only once, one morning on his way to a kolkhoz about thirty kilometres from town, and then he had said to himself: "There it is! I shall not see it again!" That,

probably, had been in the beginning of April. The sun had been up a long time and was circling the horizon, keeping the shore and the sea in a sheaf of beams, but it had not been hot. The land, the sea, the sky and the cliffs had glowed with a soft, gentle light as if each were lit up by its own, internal fire. The trees had been in bloom; their pale-pink, silvery-violet crowns and the deep-black, dark-blue sleeping shadows on the golden grass, sprinkled here and there with fallen blossoms, had intermingled like the strains of a melody heard by sight.

The vision of spring had been momentary. A day or two later green patches appeared in the crowns of the trees, the leaves budded and the summer came. Voropayev had not noticed its coming, and at once a slight twitch of alarm shot through a corner of his heart, as always happens to a man at the thought that he has missed something. And in the same instant he grew tired of his solitude and felt a yearning to be among the people whom only a moment before he had wanted to rest from.

That very same evening, resisting all the efforts of Opanas Ivanovich to persuade him to stay and continue to discuss poli-

tics, Voropayev returned to his home in town.

On May 2 and 3, the town celebrated the capture of Berlin. It is doubtful whether Voropayev slept an hour during those forty-eight; he was quite hoarse, his eyes were sunken and he staggered when he walked. But he already knew from experience that he could go on staggering like this for another two weeks. The weariness of victory is not fatal for a man. On May 4 and 5 he was at the kolkhozes again, and on the sixth he was returning home on a kolkhoz cart. They rode at a leisurely pace. Styopka Ogarnov, who was driving, began to question Voropayev about the war, but he soon gave it up in disgust when he saw him dozing off even as he was answering his questions. To think that he was riding with Voropayev himself and not to hear him talk about the war, he reflected bitterly. It was enough to make one cry.

They passed the road-minder's hut. Even before they reached it a woman who was playing an accordion peered at them and shouted:

"Isn't that the propagandist?"

"Yes, but he's dog-tired. They've worn him out," answered Styopa.

"Pull up! I'll be back in a minute."

They helped Voropayev out of the cart and brought him a glass of milk just from the cow.

"If you can't talk then do it on your fingers, but tell us what's doing in Berlin!"

Although he knew no more than what had been stated in the Supreme Commander-in Chief's Order, he could tell a good story, and probably all he said was true.

And that is what he did. It was not until late at night, after promising Styopa to give him a special talk about the war another time, that he got home more dead than alive.

Lena locked him in and told Sophia Ivanovna and Tanya to tell everybody who called that the Colonel had not yet returned.

After a good sleep he sat down at the radio set.

The ether was silent about the capture of Berlin. There were two transmissions from the German capital by British journalists who talked at length about the damage caused by Allied aircraft and about Montgomery's men having been long expected there; and the German radio stations, still operating for

some reason, mumbled something about capitulation and then went on to broadcast funeral marches and a declaration about Hitler having departed this world.

In the endeavour to catch the sounds in the ether, Voropayev put his ear close to the receiver as if listening to the hidden thoughts of Europe, as if she were murmuring to him her hopes in feverish sleep.

Prague was fighting. The Americans were hastening to the frontiers of Austria. The British were capturing frightened Hitlerite generals in the backyards of the war and in prose and poetry were glorifying their "Monty," as if Montgomery's soldiers were the only ones on the battlefield.

This hypocrisy did not offend Voropayev so much as disgust him, but he knew too little as yet to enable him to draw any conclusions.

"Nothing from my friends, and Shura doesn't write. . . ."

To tell the truth, he was thirsting for news from her, although he tried to assure himself that his interest in Goreva had been roused only by the fact that she was now in the thick of events, the nature of which he could only surmise.

But the vision of Goreva persistently hovered before his eyes, and to suppress the longing that threatened to drown all his, as it seemed to him, correct thoughts, he forced himself to think of something else.

He had often pictured to himself entering some German town at the head of his corps during these days of surrender and plunging into the hectic work that would face him.

After posting guards at warehouses and stores and having the announcements of the Commandant posted on the walls, he would hurry to the Town Hall to which the townsfolk had already flocked. Here too there would be people who had escaped from concentration camps, or had been living underground. Organize them. Assemble the intellectuals. Select the town authorities. Find out the whereabouts of the fascist leaders and start registering all the members of the fascist gang, all the officers and privates.

The street scenes would provide tremendous material for action. A drunken prostitute would turn up; a couple would be carrying a bale of stolen goods; hungry children would follow company field kitchens with envious eyes. Actors in the theatre would be

crowding in consternation behind the scenes burning portraits of Hitler and anxiously wondering what was in store for them. It would be necessary to reassure them at once. Let them arrange for a performance within three days. Put up a cinema screen in the town square in the evening and put on a film showing a military parade in Moscow or a physical-culture festival, and next day put up a performance of the Divisional Song and Dance Troupe at the theatre.

And then to the factories. No doubt the engineering staff had gone into hiding. Appeal to the workers. In those places where the management had fled, put the business into the hands of workers' and clerks' committees. See to it that the electricity and water supply is maintained and that the sewers are working. Assemble the medical people, the police, talk to the fire brigade, visit the municipal hospital. All this in the morning. Then take a bite at the Commandant's Headquarters, where there is already a crowd. Somebody has been arrested; somebody wants to get somewhere but they won't let him; somewhere a gang of robbers, or a fuel dump, or a paper warehouse has been discovered. And the editor of the local newspaper and

the owner of a big restaurant are already waiting for an interview. The former offers his services and his printing plant; the latter wants to put up a notice that his restaurant is the Commandatura's. Here too are people released from concentration camps. The English want to be sent home within ten minutes, no later. The Americans want to send home reassuring cables. A Czech is pleading with the sentries to give him a gun because he knows where Nazis are hiding. People from Poltava and Zhitomir have brought their bosses to be locked up. Italians are demanding passes to their frontier.

On the sidewalk outside the Commandatura the colour-bearers of the national columns are singing and dancing. They have their colours with them. The Commandant's chauffeur brings some tins of paint and they paint the flags of the victor countries on the colours.

Children have already been born; some old folks have already died; somebody has already fallen sick and needs medical assistance although tanks are still firing near the town and the men wounded in the street fighting have not yet been evacuated. This is in the early afternoon.

And then the first evening sets in in the captured town, which is always full of alarm. A fire. You must go and see. Shouts for help. Go at once to see. A fascist who has not surrendered throws a bomb. Investigate at once. Knock at a house, go into a dark flat, talk to the frightened inhabitants and think about the next morning, to have a band marching through the deserted streets, to put the loud-speakers on. Night—a chain of conferences, one after another. Is there bread, meat and vegetables? Are the hospitals supplied with all they need? The scoundrels who were captured, have they been interrogated? Spend an hour or two in the Gestapo building, talk to the released prisoners, settle the fuel question. All this must be done during the night. And in the morning, after a cold sluice, poke your head out of the Commandatura window and with inflamed eyes see the smoke from the factories, listen to the swish of the brooms and to the low conversation of the townsfolk who are clearing the streets, and at the same time catch the sounds of a distant loud-speaker that is talking to the town on a peaceful subject—and then get into your car again, drive through the streets again, and so up to one o'clock, when the people come pouring

out of their houses, you hear a hesitant laugh and some kiddy claps his hands for some reason. And then you say to the orderly: "Let nobody in. I'm going to sleep like a newborn babe for two hours. . . ."

Lena's voice interrupted this reverie. Voropayev was still far away in the captured town.

"What's happened? Didn't I ask not to be disturbed for two hours?" he said, keeping his head close to the radio set. "What's the matter, Lenochka?"

"Vasyutin wants to see you at the District Committee."

"All right. Say I'll be there at once."

* * *

"Think over my proposal and accept it," said Vasyutin. "If you like, we'll ask Gennadi Alexandrovich. What's your opinion?"

Korytov rubbed his forehead.

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps he will manage it. Only he must be more serious."

Voropayev looked at him in surprise.

"I ask you not to propose me for District secretary, but to leave me in my present job," he said. "I have never before had the

chance of being in the most poetic sector of Party work—to be a propagandist, to do work of pure inspiration. I don't want to be a mediocre District secretary, I want to be an exemplary propagandist. Promote people from below. Take Pausov from us if you must, put Tsimbal on a different job, but leave me alone. I have turned out to be by nature a good teacher, then why should I take a job in which I will make a worse showing?"

Vasyutin drummed his fingers on the desk.

"All right," he said. "All right. I'll take Pausov from you. I'll take Podnebesko. I'll put Tsimbal in the *Pioneer* Olive Sovkhoz.... To hell with you, stay here, both of you, and wrangle with each other since you seem to like it." With that he got up, buttoned his coat and put his cap on, pulling it down to his ears, to show that as far as he was concerned the discussion was closed.

Voropayev and Korytov got up too.

"Any man can get played out," continued Vasyutin. "And Korytov is played out. Is he a bad worker? No. Can he find his proper place? Of course he can. It was my opinion that he should be given a job at the Regional

Centre, to give him an opportunity to see his work from the side, so to speak. . . . Will you be able to work here together? Give me a straight answer, Gennadi Alexandrovich."

Korytov fingered some things on the desk and without looking up said mournfully:

"We will."

"Will you?" Vasyutin asked Voropayev.

"We will," answered Voropayev just as curtly and drily.

"In that case, get into harness . . . you devils!"

He stepped up to them and took them each by the shoulder.

"To tell the truth, I am pleased with the way things are going here. You are pushing people to the front, that's true. But after the talk I've been hearing about you on all sides I thought to myself: wouldn't it be better to separate them? Well, you've given me your word?"

"Korytov is hard to get on with," said Voropayev, "but we'll pull together."

"And are you easy to get on with?" Korytov interjected, wagging his head. "What a treasure you are to be sure! . . . You like to pose, brother, yes you do, don't try to deny it. You like to pose, but you've got a good

head on you, and we'll pull together. If I had been removed from this job I'd have been mortally offended, but now—I tell you straight—I'll drive the life out of you, I'll.... Well, all right. I've given my word."

Vasyutin smiled and winked at them both.

"Very well, I wish you.... But see you don't get squabbling over petty things.... I've heard that Comrade Stalin once uttered the words of gold: complete unanimity prevails only in the graveyard. What? I don't need corpses; but I'll not tolerate squabbling. Do you understand? As for the rest, I don't care if you go for each other hammer and tongs as long as the work is done."

He shook hands with them heartily and when he had already reached the corridor outside of Korytov's office he said:

"If ever I am removed from work at the Regional Centre I'll ask to be put on district, even on village work, as long as it's Party work.... You are good fellows, sticking to each other like that, good fellows!" and he went out with a farewell wave of his hand.

Korytov and Voropayev remained standing at the desk.

"Well, keep . . ." said Voropayev after a long silence.

"Keep well," answered Korytov politely. "Going home?"

"Yes. Any instructions?"

"Not just now."

* * *

The silence of the ordinary southern night flowed on. In its current there arose now a distant shout, now the echo of a song, and now the rattle of a passing truck on the high-road. At first Voropayev's ear caught nothing unusual, but soon he distinguished the frenzied ringing of the telephone at the post office and heard somebody running heavily along the road and breathing as if his lungs would burst like soldiers do in hand-to-hand fighting. Came a knock at the window, then another. Excited voices were heard: "Are you deaf, or what?..." "Get up!" and suddenly a shrill whistle.

Lena ran out on the balcony and looked down into the darkness. A violet, fragrant strand of wistaria fell across her shoulder like a scarf.

"Who's there?" she enquired in her piercing voice and evidently guessing what was the matter she spread out her arms and turned towards Voropayev.

"Peace!" he said. "They must have concluded peace!" He embraced her and imprinted a strong kiss upon her dry, rough lips.

"It's peace, Lenochka!"

"Yes, I suppose so. What else can it be after Berlin?" she answered, tickling his bare neck with her words and still keeping her arms about him, casually, as it were.

"There you are," and some endearing expression was lost in his smile. "There you are.... Yes, that's it."

"Yes," she answered, and he felt that she was smiling and the smile seemed to brush his neck lightly.

People were already calling from the street.

"Vitaminich!... Our side has won!... Vitaminich!... The propagandist has fallen asleep!... Elena Petrovna! Wake your man up!..."

"Wake me up, Lena," he said.

"Sleep! I won't wake you up!" she answered in a bantering tone, and casting off all shyness she ardently enfolded him in her arms.

But heavy steps were heard on the staircase and she reluctantly released him.

"When I do kiss for once, fate is against it," she said, frowning and smiling that smile that became her face so well, and surprised by her own resoluteness, she suddenly put her arms around him again and hugged him.

"That's right! . . . Give it to him! . . . Serve him right!" shouted Tvorozhenkov, bursting on to the balcony, and elbowing Lena aside as if she had already performed her duty and it was now his turn, he flung his arms around Voropayev, hugging him and at the same time pushing him towards the door.

"Come, come along, old man!" he kept saying, hugging and pushing Voropayev, and then to Lena, "Wake your people up!"

"Light! Put the lights on!"

Light shone from Tvorozhenkov's house and then from the others. Sleepy children, squealing and whistling with delight, brought dry wood into the street and lit a bonfire.

Somebody struck up a tune on an accordion and the first couple was already whirling on the pebbly road.

"Look! Look!"

Far out at sea the lights of a big ship appeared and the faint sound of its siren came cautiously across the still water like the first rumble of thunder.

The woman on duty at the post office, bubbling over with enthusiasm, related that peace had been signed in Berlin that morning, adding details that just happened to enter her head.

Everybody believed her.

Voropayev held Lena tightly by the arm; people flung their arms round his neck and kissed him ardently, and he too wept and kissed, unable to utter a word because of his emotion.

Somebody shouted that there was to be a meeting at the District Committee headquarters and that peace would be announced there and the crowd spontaneously hurried down to the shore, singing, dancing and cheering.

Bonfires flared up at the *Pervomaisky* and *Kalinin* kolkhozes. A bright, resinous blaze glared like a molten star high up under the sky in the black bosom of the mountains. That was solitary Zarubin celebrating victory with the rest.

"Long live Stalin!"

A motorbus carrying new arrivals to the local sanatorium pulled up in front of the crowd.

"Have they found Hitler?" enquired the driver, but he was pulled out of his cabin

and tossed so vigorously that nuts and washers dropped from the pockets of his padded coat.

"Catch hold of the air!" he was advised, and he obediently stretched out his arms and shouted something with such rapture as if he had just realized what had happened.

The passengers were requested to alight from the bus one at a time, and they too were tossed, each in turn, after which the bus turned round and followed the crowd to the shore.

Children, lifted shoulder-high by strangers, raced on in front, forgetting about their parents. Somebody on the beach was firing a double-barrelled gun. Small boys were running about scattering sparks from fire sticks.

Voropayev walked in the crowd by Lena's side, but they could not exchange a word, so loud was the roar and tumult.

Peace! What sort of a peace will it be? How will they recompense us for the incalculable harm they have done us? Peace! Only Russia knew the price of that word. But at that moment, nobody, probably, was thinking of the future as yet, all were possessed by one thought, by one sensation: the war was over, we have been avenged!

Rybalchenko, in the uniform of a Lieutenant Colonel of the Coast Defence, dived out of the crowd.

"Victory! Isn't it grand?" he yelled, as if in battle. "We Russians have captured Berlin! Knocked out all the fascists! We're the first to achieve victory!"

Voropayev walked with his arm round Lena, glancing at her now and again and smiling; and she, putting her own interpretation on his smile, looked at him with happy eyes.

"But you dare not kiss me," he said laughing.

"Who, I?"

"You, of course."

"Daren't I!"

"Try."

"I will when I want to," and as if to prove her daring she took his head in her hands and slowly kissed his eyes several times. She was so happy that all her shyness was gone.

When the enormous crowd from the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz reached the centre of the town it was met by people on horseback from the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz and by several truckloads of people from Shirokogorov's sovkhoz. Townsfolk, sailors, kolkhozniks, soldiers and children all danced, sang and embraced.

Korytov, standing pale and excited on a desk that had just been dragged out of some office, vainly called for silence. Smiling and with his arms outstretched helplessly, his whole appearance showed that he was incapable of winning the attention of the people in order to tell them what it was essential for them to know.

Suddenly somebody shouted:

"Voropayev! Voropayev!"

"We want Voropayev!... Shoulder him!"

And up he soared above the crowd. Korytov gave him his cue: "The Germans signed the terms of surrender today."

But that was not the point. The people were exultant and rejoicing not because the Germans had announced their surrender in writing and not verbally, but because we were victorious.

It was from this that Voropayev began.

"Our country has shed much blood, but truth can be attained only by blood. We are victorious. We. And victory is ours because all of us fought for it, young and old. We were imbued with but one desire multiplied by two hundred million hearts. We have sternly and ruthlessly avenged the wrong that was done us—let that be a lesson

to those who raised their weapons against us.

"There is no power that can withstand the power of the Soviets. Let mankind register the event of this day: Socialism alone has won victory for all! The Soviet people have come to the forefront of humanity. For thirty years the most infamous lies were told about them. But they built Socialism. Those abroad would not believe it. They set out to beat the fascists. Again those abroad would not believe. But we have screwed Hitler's neck, we have liberated two-thirds of Europe and are now victors in Berlin. Will those abroad even now doubt our strength, refuse to pay tribute to our glory? No! Now they will no longer be able to hush up our achievements. They will no longer be able to slander us! Henceforth we will forever appear in the eyes of mankind as the most powerful and most just people on earth! . . .

"Long live Stalin!"

* * *

Lena waited for him with uplifted, excited face.

This was the first time she had heard him deliver a speech, and what amazed her was

not so much the meaning of the words he uttered as the power of feeling which called forth those words.

At first it had seemed to her that he was speaking so well because she had only just shared her thoughts with him and, as she believed, had given him timely assistance. But following the trend of his speech, she gradually realized that although he was saying exactly what she herself was feeling, she had not up to now been conscious of this feeling, and had not been able to express it. She trembled with joy. She raised her hands and pressed them to her cheeks, and gazing at Voropayev as if at some wondrous being, she whispered and smiled at him.

When Voropayev finished speaking and was helped to the ground she could not for a long time believe that he was at her side.

No, he had not taken his thoughts from her tiny heart, but had imbued her heart with his thoughts, thoughts she had not possessed before. He had given them to her and she had taken them as her own and had been enriched by them.

"I am dumb by his side," was the thought that at once occurred to her. "He will find it dull with me if we live together."

"What's the matter, Lena, have you lost your tongue?" Voropayev called to her, shaking her arm.

She smiled sadly on hearing that Voropayev had noticed her muteness.

"I didn't know you could do such things with the people," she said, shaking her head. "So that's what you are like, Voropayev!"

He could not help feeling embarrassed under her enraptured gaze.

"It's not what I do with the people, but what the people do with me," he answered. "In an office I can't put three words together, but when I am among the people the devil himself doesn't frighten me. I have been in the Party twenty years, I am an old man and I have long experience of life, but will you believe it, work among you here has rejuvenated me. I feel, not with my mind, but with my shoulders, my body, my breath, that I am the people, among the people, with the people, the voice of the people. Oh, how lucky I am! . . ."

"Can you," she asked shyly, "can you speak so nicely about us two?"

"I think I can," he answered, laughing with the joy that welled up from his heart as he realized that she was expecting him to

say something that would decide her fate. "Shall I?"

"Yes," she answered, frightened by her own boldness.

"Do you know what you are?" he said jocularly. "You are a wild apple tree that has grown up in the depths of the mountains. A strong, sturdy, modest little apple tree that has never feared the severest frost and is always the first to bloom. You are a brave apple tree. You stand in the forest and bloom to your heart's content as if you were the sturdiest tree in the world. . . ."

"Now say something about yourself," she whispered.

"All right. I'll say something about myself. . . ."

But he was unable to continue. Vasyutin caught up with them. Peering closely at Lena and holding his hand out to her he said:

"You are a brick, 'pon my word, Elena. . . ."

"Petrovna," Voropayev interjected to help him out.

"Elena Petrovna, a perfect brick for bringing Voropayev back to health for us. Now this is just the time to take him away

from you. I'm joking, of course." Turning to Voropayev, he said: "You felt it, eh? Do you see now that you can't hide any longer. What happened today is weightier than an official vote. Do you agree? Look out then!"

The three of them walked along the esplanade, stopping now and again to talk to people they met. Whenever Vasyutin spoke to Lena she answered very curtly and briefly. She did not want for anything to disgrace herself in front of the Regional Party secretary and she thought that brief answers would please him.

Korytov's wife came up, a little, plump woman wearing a child's hat with a turned-up brim and adorned for some reason with a curly black feather.

"I heard you, I heard you," she gushed in a sing-song, significant voice. "It was wonderful!" and she shook hands with Lena, a thing she had never done before. Lena blushed and her lips trembled.

* * *

Next morning Lena woke early, as usual, and after preparing breakfast for Tanya and Voropayev, hurried off to her kolkhoz. It

seemed to her that from this day a new life would start for her with Voropayev and that he would say something to her today that would definitely bring them together.

She did not say anything to her mother about this.

It was not that Sophia Ivanovna would not have understood her, but in all probability she would have waved the news aside, for she had long given up hope of understanding what Voropayev's intentions were towards her daughter and had pledged herself not to interfere in the matter.

The house which they had leased the previous winter on a "fifty-fifty" basis was now entirely her own, for as early as January Voropayev had transferred his share to her. Hence, she was now independent of him, and this circumstance alone had made her almost indifferent to Lena's love affairs, the more so that in her heart of hearts she had never believed that her marriage with Voropayev was possible.

It seemed to her that this restless man would not marry anybody, and besides, it would be no joy for the one he married.

"Tie yourself up with a man like that!" she had thought to herself on sleepless nights.

"He changes his mind more often than he changes his shirt. And for all we know, he may hop off to Moscow, and then you can whistle for him."

What seemed particularly suspicious to her was the fact that Voropayev had not yet brought his little son from Moscow, although he was continuously worrying about him.

"If his intentions were serious, he'd have brought the boy here at once."

So she let Lena know that she was not inclined to interfere in a matter that did not concern her. And speaking honestly, she had no time to worry about love affairs, for her own work had taken an excellent turn.

Vaguely feeling that her mother was suspicious of Voropayev, Lena did not share her joy with her, but at the kolkhoz they noticed the change in her at once and began to tease her about it.

Blushing, but saying nothing, Lena realized that they were glad for her sake, and if there was any envy, it was of that good, harmless kind that good but less fortunate people feel towards the more fortunate.

That day Korytov telephoned the kolkhoz and suggested that in honour of Victory Day the different brigades should enter into

socialist emulation with each other. He promised to come to the kolkhoz himself, and now Tvorozhenkova, the captain of the winegrowers' brigade, and Lena, the captain of the vegetable growers' brigade, were in the orchard discussing the likely points for emulation while waiting for Ilya Ilyich Tvorozhenkov, the captain of the tobacco growers' brigade, who was late.

Lena's brigade was stronger than the other two and its work was easier, so she tried to take upon herself the largest obligations.

Tvorozhenkova had only recently been made brigade captain and so was not sure yet how things would go. She therefore tried to be cunning. Pretending to be sorry for Lena, she advised her not to take too much upon herself and not to insist on high output percentages; but Lena saw through her ruse at once and, laughing heartily, they could not reach agreement.

They laughed and joked, and as they could not reach an agreement and neither wished to yield, their conversation imperceptibly passed on to domestic affairs and to the children.

They said that now that the war was over life would be much easier and in the autumn

it would be possible to buy new things, that it would be good if they had their own dressmaker in the kolkhoz as they had at the *Pervomaisky*.

Korytov came up noiselessly and must have heard some of this conversation, because, sitting down next to the two women, he at once began to twist his lips and tease them.

"Have you drawn up your obligations? No! Dear, dear! And you have nobody to help you? Well, come up to the office. Oh! I have a letter for you, Elena Petrovna," he added absent-mindedly and drew from his pocket a letter in a stout, wax-coloured envelope bearing the army stamp instead of a postage stamp.

"Why, have you anybody at the front?" Tvorozhenkova enquired, pretending she did not know that Lena's husband was missing.

Lena turned pale.

"Of course. . . . I did have. . . . Of course . . ." she murmured not hearing herself what she was saying. "I'll be back in a minute, Gennadi Alexandrovich," and she dashed through the orchard to her house, tearing open the envelope as she ran and hurriedly reading this frightful letter, from the end, from the middle, wherever her eyes fell upon it.

The very first page, written in a strange hand in large, round script as one writes to children not well able to read "handwriting," horrified and hurt her dreadfully, not because it was indeed hard for her to decipher handwriting, but because Goreva had taken it for granted that she was semi-illiterate.

Alexandra Ivanovna enquired about Voropayev's health, what he was doing at present and whether his son was with him, and it was evident from the letter that she had not the slightest doubt that Lena would answer her. She merely requested that the answer be not delayed as her FPO number was likely to be changed.

Lena ran biting her lips and pressing her hands to her breasts; a passer-by might have taken her for a messenger of joy. But grief overwhelmed her like a drug, and not only did she fail to hear acquaintances call her, but she even failed to recognize them, as if she were running in utter darkness, colliding with people and pushing them aside as if they were inanimate objects.

The first thought that entered her mind was that she must leave this town as quickly and imperceptibly as possible. To part from Voropayev meant subjecting herself to the

jeers and commiseration of all those who knew her, and that would be torture. To remain with Voropayev was also impossible.

"It's not my business to unravel other people's tangles, I have enough of my own," she reflected. "What shall I do? What shall I tell him, and people?"

She pictured Varvara Ogarnova's insolent eyes and became still more frightened by what had happened. She was gasping for breath from running, but she would not stop for anything, she ran beating her breasts and incoherently muttering something aloud.

"Lena, Lenochka!" somebody called from the window of the Tvorozhenkovs' house as she ran by. "Have you got some news?"

But she ran on, although she heard a door slam and somebody running out to follow her.

"Oh Lord, what do they want of me?" she thought to herself angrily, and mustering her last ounce of strength she dashed towards her house in order to shut herself off from uninvited guests.

Breathing heavily, she leaned against the gates. Now, as always, they will begin to ask her about Voropayev, but at that moment she hated and despised him with every fibre of

her being and not a kind word about him could have dropped from her lips.

"He wanted to play a four-handed game!" she thought, bubbling with anger. "To make sure of one out there and have one here. But what about me? Why do I live without hiding anything?"

* * *

Since the morning Voropayev had been working on a new lecture. He had long wanted to speak on the nature of Soviet courage; not having the necessary books and references at hand, he was content on this occasion to make do with periodicals. The theme developed quickly and vividly under his pencil, because, lacking material, he was obliged to draw his illustrations from the life that surrounded him.

He thus wrote a story about living people with names and surnames, about those who would be in his audience when he delivered the lecture.

The day, with all its sounds and voices, quietly floated through the open window, but far from distracting him, it served as a friendly and soothing accompaniment to his work.

Lena's heavy breathing and half-whispered muttering, however, came as a hostile inva-

sion of his thoughts. He got up with a foreboding of evil and rushed on to the balcony from which he had a view of the whole yard.

He saw nothing for the first moment and was surprised that the yard was deserted, but in the next instant he guessed, by hearing rather than sight, that somebody was standing under the staircase, and bending over the rail he saw Lena.

She was standing there with her eyes shut, swaying her body and slowly stroking the handrail.

"Lena! What's the matter?" he enquired, already having no doubt that some misfortune had occurred and wondering where Tanechka was.

She opened her eyes and heaving a sigh mounted the stairs to meet him.

"There," she said, offering him the crumpled and tear-moistened letter. "Read it."

"What is it? Where's it from?" he asked in alarm, and recognizing the handwriting he snatched the letter from Lena's hand.

It suddenly occurred to her that he thought that she had opened a letter addressed to him and hoped that this was the explanation of his emotion, that he would calm down on realizing his mistake. But the

cloud on Voropayev's face did not pass away, and she took this as a bad sign.

He quickly ran his eye down the letter.

"Well..." he said through his clenched teeth. "What do you think of saying in reply to her?"

"I don't know," answered Lena softly and, as always, expressionlessly. "Perhaps you will answer it?"

"She's asking you, not me."

"So I've got to answer? But what can I say, Alexei Veniaminovich?" and this soft and humble question caused a pain to shoot through Voropayev's heart. "But it's not pity she needs," was the thought that next flashed through his mind. "No, I must not deceive myself, or her...."

"What can I say when I don't know anything?" Lena asked still more softly.

"How does she address you?" Lena gave him the letter again. "Dear Lena," he read. "Ah!... Good! Well, say in reply: 'Dear Shura, this is to inform you that Voropayev is well, works hard and is satisfied with life....' What next?... Yes, 'His little boy will be brought from Moscow in a day or two....' That's all, I think. What is there to know? Write to her like that."

But this was not what Lena was expecting from Voropayev.

"All right, then, I will write," she said obediently. "But why should I write, Alexei Veniaminovich? I've had no business with her, she's a stranger to me, I don't know her at all. Why should I do her wrong, take advantage of her grief?"

Lena's words touched Voropayev to the quick.

"What grief?" he enquired with not quite sincere surprise.

"The grief that every woman must feel when she is deserted," Lena answered boldly in the same dispassionate voice, and he noticed that something new had entered her character, a sort of independence and boldness that he had not observed before.

"Let's talk about it, Lena," he said. "What do you think about our life?"

"Our?" she asked in her turn with such mournful surprise that he felt embarrassed. "So far, I have had no life of my own; as for yours, I don't know what's behind it," she added.

"What do you mean no life of your own? What about the house you now have, and your new interests, the fact that you are

different from what you were? Don't be angry with me, but once I noticed you on the balcony listening to the lesson I was giving Podnebesko. Do you remember? It was when I was giving him history lessons."

On hearing that Voropayev knew something that she had concealed from him, Lena blushed. Her face, betraying her confusion, became spiteful and hostile.

"It sounds funny to hear you say *our,*" she said, interrupting him. "Why *our,* Alexei Veniaminovich? Because we live in the same house? True, I wanted to learn something, but I was ashamed to ask you, so I listened in on the quiet when you gave Yuri lessons, but why is that *our* life, it is only my life.... Tell me, Alexei Veniaminovich, what am I to you? The people call me your wife, but that is not true. Wait! Don't interrupt me. A wife, as the people, the common people, say, is the other half. But am I your other half? I am barely a quarter. You do not reveal yourself to me, you have not enfolded me in your spirit, you have not sheltered me in your heart, you have only given me a corner in your house, and for that I thank you, of course."

She caught her breath and continued in a still sadder tone:

"If you had really wanted to be my husband, Alexei Veniaminovich, what would you have done? You would first have told me about your life with that other woman so that I could know what has remained in your heart. Your feeling towards me is only a caprice!" she said angrily, and releasing her hand from behind her back she waved it frantically in front of her. "Only that caprice doesn't come from your heart! No, no, don't tell me, not from your heart! You were sorry for yourself, so you had pity on me too, that's all your love amounts to."

"What can I say to you just now, Lena? It is quite evident that I have thought too little about our life.... About Alexandra Ivanovna's letter, you are right. Of course, I must answer it...."

"That's not the point at all. If you had any intentions towards me, you should have told her long ago. Why, you love her, Alexei Veniaminovich, can't I see? How can you do a thing like that? Go away, say nothing, and pick up someone else's life, but what about her?"

"Have you been thinking about her, Lena?"

"Of course! How could I not think about her when I am cutting across her life? And

the letters she writes you! I'll confess now—I have read them. You tore them up and threw them in the basket, but I stuck them together and read them. She is a clever woman, Alexei Veniaminovich. I couldn't help crying when I read her letters, and I thought to myself: he'll drop me in the same way. But it would be much harder for me, I have a family to keep. Do you think I would not have gone to the front? Perhaps I would be dancing in Berlin now. Look! That's my Berlin!" and without her customary tenderness she nodded towards the door from behind which Tanyushka's little voice was heard. "That's all the glory I have!"

Voropayev listened to her with mixed feelings of fear and respect. He said nothing because he did not know what to say, and he was ashamed of his silence.

But how could he explain to her that he had been drawn to her by a profoundly human feeling born of his loneliness and consternation, which are so hard to bear for men who had lost one life and had not yet found another.

Had he known how his personal life would turn out? And what was it that could be called his personal life? The fate of the young

Podnebeskos had occupied him almost as much as his own. Old Tsimbal, Stupina and Gorodtsov were also part of his family. He could not have deserted them without regret. But it was perfectly clear to him that this had not been the way Lena had dreamed of a family. Family life occupied so little place in the mind of a man like himself that it seemed not to exist, and it was not to that shore that he had trimmed his sail. Perhaps it was a matter to be regretted, but he could do nothing to alter it.

Meanwhile Lena continued in a calmer and even masterful tone:

"Don't tell me anything, Alexei Veniaminovich. I myself have thought and wondered more than once whether we could live together, and now I see that nothing will come of it. Love, in my opinion, Alexei Veniaminovich, means believing that the one you love wishes you nothing but good. You wish me good, but you do me evil. You wanted to forget Alexandra Ivanovna because you were sorry to have to bring her into your life . . . because it would be hard for her here. But it seems that she is not in the least bit sorry for herself, that all she wants is to be near you. Don't be afraid. As for me . . . I . . ." her thin,

rough lips, always so calm, firm and ironical, suddenly twisted into a restrained grimace... "it seems that I've got to arrange my life in another way. I will not hatch happiness in your bosom."

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips. She did not withdraw it.

"Scrub your floors and make your tea—that won't be hard for me at all; but anything more, no, neither you nor I will be happy, Alexei Veniaminovich.... Take my advice, do, as from a sister. I don't wish you any harm: ask her to come. She won't do your cooking and won't run to buy cigarettes for you, but...."

And unable to find the words she needed she spread out her arms, but the freedom and grace with which she did that was far more expressive than words.

"I've been watching the Podnebeskos," she went on, sitting down next to Voropayev as if after all that she had said she had acquired the right to comradely intimacy. "The arguments they have! It drives them to tears! And they get vexed with each other. But it simply makes you envious to see how they strive for each other. But I? Could I get on like that with you?..."

Voropayev looked at her amazed and touched by the wonderful truth and wisdom of what she was saying.

"I have no spite against you, Alexei Veniaminovich," she continued through her tears, stroking his hand. "You have taught me how to live, but you do not yet know how to live yourself. Look how much you have taught others, but you don't know how to take your own share. And nobody will forgive me if I get you to tie yourself up with me, nobody will! Wait! Wait! Have a little more patience! I have never talked so much in my life. When I read her letter this morning I was so upset, I got so angry with you! I was ashamed. I asked myself: what am I now? But now that I have had my say I can see that my fate has not yet been decided, that all my life is still in front of me, and although my heart aches, I don't want to cross another woman's life. Now that's enough, Alexei Veniaminovich. Poor, dear man, I must have talked your head off!" And getting up lightly, she walked to the balcony.

"Natasha will have her baby in a day or two," he heard her say softly.

"What's this in a day or two?" he enquired, not quite catching what she had said.

"I say, Natasha Podnebesko will have her baby in a day or two," she repeated. "So I'll make arrangements at my kolkhoz and go down to stay with her. Yuri is away, and she'll be frightened if she's left alone."

* * *

"How did it all come about?" Voropayev asked himself that same day. "Why should that little, reticent woman, who has lost her husband whom she loved, have gone into raptures at once because I had chosen her? Any fool could have seen that Lena was interested not so much in me as in the life I was leading."

But the more deeply he pondered over all that had passed the more convinced he became that everything was not so simple, that Lena loved him. Of course, she dreaded the world of his previous interests, to which he might return at any moment; she was frightened by the apparent ease with which he had cast off one life and had begun to build another, but she loved him.

He had not been able to analyze himself. He was compelled to confess that while being able to do everything in the world, there was one thing he could not do: arrange

his own life. His personal life had arranged itself, at least, so it seemed to him now, or, if not itself, it was arranged easily and very simply.

Happiness is elusive. You can never know whether it is there or not. You can ascertain whether you are happy or not only by testing it on those around you. It had seemed to him that Lena was happy. He had been grievously mistaken. He felt embarrassed at the thought that he had been building something artificial and lifeless. But at the same time, strange as it may seem, the consciousness that he was alone again was something like a feeling of relief.

CHAPTER TEN

In the middle of June 1945 Alexandra Ivanovna Goreva visited the Austrian castle at Wallsee, on the Danube, near those parts beyond Krems so familiar to us from the pages of *War and Peace*.

This castle belonged to the Hapsburgs, and the last of the line of Austro-Hungarian emperors, forty-year-old Duke Joseph, bald, with thin, badly-dyed moustaches and a pimply face, conducted her through the castle and showed her the layout of the rooms.

Goreva had been asked to look over the place to see whether it was suitable for the reception of guests from the American army.

Our officers had visited the Americans and had returned in complete perplexity. In their honour an infantry parade had been arranged and the soldiers had marched past in precise and rhythmic step headed by a band led by a Drum Major who with clown-

ish virtuosity had performed the most amazing tricks with his ornate mace. The officers, wearing wide trousers that almost covered their shoes, and particularly the tall, elderly General with the face of an actor and wearing light-coloured buckskin breeches, looked more like elegant sportsmen than soldiers; and there had been something theatrical in the accentuatedly precise, almost mechanical manner in which they had performed their military exercises.

After the parade the guests were invited to the officers' canteen where privates handed round glasses of whiskey and tiny ham sandwiches.

And that was all.

Our officers decided to invite the Americans to be their guests and to give them a Russian welcome. Supplies of Moscow vodka and of caviar in the world-famous blue tins with the inscription "Caviar Russe" had already been obtained, and a forty-pound young pig had been roasted. One of the divisions reported that it was sending some fresh trout, another proposed that the Americans be treated to steamed Uzbek dumplings stuffed with mutton, onions and red pepper, a dish concerning which General Korolenko

had said approvingly that "it blows a man up at once like a Katyusha."

Goreva arrived at the castle about three days before the reception was to take place with the view to setting up a hospital there, but she abandoned this plan after her very first inspection.

An avenue of old linden trees stretched to the front gates, beyond which there was a bridge that led to the palace itself.

An ancient, ivy-covered piece of Turkish cannon in the portals of the second gate, a narrow bridge with battlemented walls stretching to the rock on which the castle was built, and lastly, a tiny courtyard connecting the two wings of the vast palace. A pink clump of small climber roses crept up the grey stone walls.

Crudely massive staircases with carved banisters strong enough to last for centuries, sculptured window frames, lead rain pipes and pointed Gothic roofs with spires that reminded one of fishbones—such are the first details that catch the eye.

The interior of the palace was crammed with dazzling riches, fine taste and beauty; but there was such a plethora of this, one precious thing so outshone, eclipsed, the

other, that the senses were dulled by the endless series of tapestries, bronzes, crystals, mirrors, paintings, furniture and arms. In the chaos of fleeting impressions one forgot the rarest of things, and yet the history of many of the objects that ornamented the palace was the history of European intrigue, friendship and legends.

"It is doubtful whether man needs all this pomp," Goreva reflected as she roamed through the gold, mirror and silk decorated rooms.

In glass cases hung rich, ancient costumes. Blue and silver brocades ornamented with precious stones; pink, green, lilac and white velvets; silk shoes with diamond buckles and silk camisoles with ruby buttons; elegant gold walking sticks and amethyst snuff boxes testified to a voluptuous age that had long become a hazy legend.

Portraits of kings, emperors, popes, cardinals, generals and diplomats by famous court artists hung on the walls.

There were no paintings that one could really admire, nor even books that one could read, there was not a good piano, and the clavichords and spinets that stood here and there had long uttered no sound.

"Books?" exclaimed the Duke, wondering. "My God! they filled the whole garret, and I have some in my chambers."

And he added:

"Eternal ideas, unfortunately, are recorded in exceedingly short-lived material; paper ages, and in a matter of a hundred or a hundred and fifty years it turns into a lot of litter."

Goreva was amazed to learn that no repairs had been done to the castle for a half a century, that the roof leaked, there were enormous cracks in the floor, and there were only two toilets in the whole place, one of which was closed. No, this place was no use for a hospital.

The Duke waved his hand with a mournful smile.

"I can barely make ends meet, Madame. I simply cannot afford to have this ancient piece of history repaired."

"But it is the history of your race. . . ."

He corrected her:

"To a still larger degree it is the history of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. More than once has the fate of Europe been decided within these walls. But what can I do? I have a large family, four grown-up daugh-

ters. Can you imagine what that costs? It is a dreadful thing in these times, Madame, to have four dowryless daughters."

"Dowryless! Why, the contents of any one of these rooms would be enough to satisfy the most exacting suitor."

The Duke scratched his head disconcertedly.

"I doubt whether my daughters can find worthy husbands in Austria. As for the Americans ..." he paused for a moment... "I'll see what they look like nowadays. They used to visit me fairly often before the war," he added.

The balcony of one of the rooms overhung the Danube that was surging far below. The view was amazing for its intensity and colour, and it was infinitely poetic.

Bright green stretches of glorious, broad-crowned trees, such as Goreva had seen only in old engravings, swayed on the other side of the Danube, and the high rock on which the castle stood was covered with ivy which clothed both the rock and the castle walls in the same green raiment.

The water of the Danube was heavy and of a greenish-yellow colour. The charred hulls of barges and boats swept past swiftly.

"Could you not lease the castle for a hotel for rich tourists, or for a sanatorium?"

"We are not accustomed to trade in what is regarded as family honour," answered Duke Joseph haughtily and indicating with a light wave of the hand that it was time to go on further.

Buffalo horns, deers' antlers and boars' tusks mounted on wooden shields bearing the dates on which the trophies were taken filled the dingy corridors.

No doubt all the crowned heads of Europe had come to hunt here. In glass cases lay fragments of foreign standards captured at some time or other by the owners of this castle, as was indicated by inscriptions. There were many of these standards, but the Duke was in a hurry.

"History, history, nothing but dust now," he said hurriedly, not stopping at a case filled with decorations received by his despotic ancestors in the course of several centuries.

* * *

In the morning a parade was held in a forest glade near the castle walls. A mixed battalion of Chevaliers of the Order of Glory,

huddled on a small space hemmed in on the flanks by tree stumps and scrub, marched magnificently past the stand which had been erected for the American guests.

The men marched with their tommy guns at the ready with such bold freedom that it seemed that if the command were to ring out: "Into the Danube!" they would have dashed into the water in perfect step and with the same perfect rhythm.

After the parade, all the guests proceeded to the castle. Goreva was asked to act as interpreter in case the guests wished to go over the place. She consented, as one of our officers present was Golyshev, with whom she arranged to go back together.

Two of the Americans did indeed prefer to see the castle rather than have lunch, and they passed from room to room accompanied by the Duke.

One of these Americans, an elderly man with the mobile face of an actor, had long been acquainted with the owner of the castle.

"I stayed here in nineteen thirty-nine," he reminded the Duke. "With Philips, the man who bought Napoleon's bedroom. He is in Europe now and would like to see you."

The Duke spread out his arms and glanced disconcertedly at Goreva.

"All gone. Down to the last stick. I have only one Maria Theresa dinner service left," he said hypocritically.

"With a guarantee of genuineness?" distrustfully enquired the other American, a short, red-cheeked Major with four rows of ribbons on his chest.

"Yes, of course. Actually, that is what you pay for," answered the Duke.

The Major was sincerely surprised.

"What about all this?" he pointed round the room.

"From the antique store," said the first American, laughing. "In Vienna, dear boy, they can even fake the Pope of Rome. . . ."

"You don't mind doing a bit of trade, of course, do you, Duke?" the little, fat, fighting Major enquired. "How are you off for soap? I own a soap factory. In France I was able to make two or three profitable deals. Can I do any business with you? In addition, I have bought shares in a soap factory in Paris."

"No, I don't mind. Soap is good currency. But neither I nor anybody else can start business without credit. You must bear that in mind."

"That will be all right," said the American who had been here in nineteen thirty-nine. "That's what Philips is coming to Vienna to see you about."

They entered the drawing room and glanced at the paintings and the showcases.

"I was in the Crimea, in Russia, at the beginning of this year, Mr. Joseph," continued the American. "I saw the Vorontsov Palace in Alupka. The Russians put Churchill up there. It is a beautiful building, in very fine taste. Unfortunately, the Russians don't sell palaces."

"How are they getting on there?" the Major enquired. "Are they still sticking to their Socialism? They are fine fighters, I must say."

"The Bolsheviks are fine fellows, but very hard to get on with. Frightfully obstinate. Yes, they are sticking to their Socialism, I should say so!"

"Fine fighters," repeated the little, fat Major. "They fight like demons.... Well, tell me in a few words—what's life like there?"

"The war has done them a lot of harm, but for all that, I think they will rise out of the ashes sooner than you dispose of your soap in Austria."

"Soap is good currency," said the Major gravely, failing to see the joke. "Soap, caustic soda and essential oils are sounder than all your marks, crowns, francs, lei and pengös. What do I want Vienna for if I can't find customers there?"

"We are still a long way from Vienna. So far, only the Russians are there," said the American with the actor's face. "I don't know what we shall meet with there."

The Duke said to soothe him:

"There is one good thing about the Bolsheviks, they don't capture markets by making deals, like the Major here does."

"Oho!" laughed the Major. "Don't they? In France, where, as you know, there isn't a single Russian battalion, you hear nothing else but talk about Russian aid. You offer them soap, but they say no, we'll wait, perhaps we'll get Russian soap. You offer them raw rubber, which the Bolsheviks haven't got, but you hear the same thing: no, we'll wait, perhaps the Russians will help us with rubber."

The Duke looked anxiously at Goreva, not knowing whether she was listening to the conversation or not.

"I know several sound firms in Vienna," said the Major. "Do you know Alfred Frank?"

"I am very sorry to tell you that he was executed," answered the Duke.

"What for?" the two Americans asked in one voice.

"For being a Jew."

"Oh, that's a trifle! The main thing is that the firm's capital should not come under the nationalization decree. That would have happened had the firm worked for Hitler. Are there any heirs?"

"I doubt it. The Gestapo made a clean job of it."

"The firm could not have gone under merely because of Frank's death," persisted the Major. "Somebody must have taken it over. A sound business with a good reputation is a public institution. And what about the Colonial Goods Company?"

"Still going."

"And Zimmerman?"

"Alive, but lying low. There's something wrong about his connections."

"Nonsense! A contract with an American firm will cover up all his previous connections. The Bolsheviks won't get ahead of me

here!" The Major livened up. "But I like these Russians, they are swell soldiers."

Evidently afraid that the Major's tempting offer would not materialize, the Duke said courteously:

"I am not asking how I can find you, Herr Major, but I would like to tell you how it would be easiest to find me."

The Major took out a visiting card.

"I have no permanent address here yet, but my word is my bond. In about two weeks' time I'll send a man to you, because, being in uniform, it's difficult for me to get away. Would you care to do a little business on a commission basis?"

"With pleasure," answered the Duke. "I have done some like it before."

The fat little Major drew a thick envelope from his pocket.

"You'll find everything here, price list and terms. D'you know," he said, turning to his fellow countryman who had been here in nineteen thirty-nine, "I have adapted myself very well to wartime conditions, I always have with me a dozen or so prospectuses and price lists, and as many drawn-up contracts. I thought of that when I was in Alexandria. You never can tell when you will be able to

visit a place a second time. We flooded the Egyptian market with our goods right under enemy fire, so to speak. The English were wild with envy."

"But didn't Montgomery do anything to stop this sort of Allied cooperation?"

"By the time they guessed what we were up to we had the job done. Have you ever been to Africa?"

"No."

"Well, d'you know, this is one of the most interesting pages in the history of war. We unloaded ammunition together with samples of goods, and in the same operation we captured a city and also the market. In Italy, of course, we improved our methods. On my tanks I had painted the advert: 'Buy Sanit, the best soap in the world.'"

The Duke listened politely and twiddled his moustache, but it seemed to the Major that he was sceptical about what he was saying.

"Does this surprise you?" he asked. "You must be very naive! Very well, then, Duke, in this envelope you will find everything that interests me and you." To his fellow countryman he said: "And now come along and try that Russian vodka."

"If our gallant colleagues have left any. . . . Let's go and reconnoitre."

The Americans bid farewell to the Duke and went to the table. The Duke remained with Goreva.

The sound of the rushing waters of the Danube came through the open windows. The scion of emperors dared not speak first, but unable to keep silent any longer he said, speaking into space:

"Such is life, Madame."

Goreva made no reply, and the Duke noiselessly glided out of the room.

* * *

Golyshev laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks, and his face, flushed with wine, broke into perspiration from laughing.

"Now that's a fighting Major if you like!" he said, wiping his eyes. "Brave fellow! And he was probably telling the truth. A fat little fellow, red cheeks and eyeglasses? Yes, I know him. Commander of a tank regiment. I was introduced to him about five days ago. A good officer they say. Captured Metz. But think of it! Fights with soap!"

The chauffeur, who liked to have a familiar talk with his chief, butted in:

"Their chauffeurs are also always on the make, Comrade Major. Capitalism! What can you do about it? And they offered some nice little things, I must say," he concluded, in a tone of regret.

"And no doubt they are accusing us of conducting propaganda," said Golyshev, still laughing and wiping his flushed face. "In the spring I helped the Austrian peasants here to do their ploughing. The Germans had taken all their horses away and it was getting late, so I helped them out. Well, this same Major—he had come to our headquarters on some business or other—he asks me: 'Are you going to take a share of the crop, or how?' 'No,' I says. 'Just for a thank you.' Then he winked at me and said: 'I understand. Propaganda.' Selling soap is nothing, but helping people to plough their land is politics, ideological conquest.... And you, Anton, be careful! I suppose they treated you to rum."

"They offered me some, Comrade Major, but I said: no thanks. I didn't even taste it," answered the chauffeur with dignity.

"Yes, of course, 'didn't even taste it.' Don't tell me," said the Major banteringly, but evidently satisfied.

"Alexandra Ivanovna, do you remember

me saying that I'd like to remain here? Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember, but I didn't understand what you meant."

"You didn't understand?" retorted Golyshev in surprise. "But do you understand now? Won't you be sorry to go away from here, where we have shed so much of our blood, without knowing that the people here have started a new life? You have seen what the people here are like and you must feel that they can't wisely arrange their future.... In the little town where my regiment is quartered there's been no bread on sale for four days, although there is plenty of flour. Why? Because some people own the flour, others own the transportation facilities and others again own the bakeries, and so this equation of three unknown quantities remains unsolved. They hold conferences and talk and talk, but the people are without bread. Or take vegetables. 'Why are there no vegetables?' I ask them. They say: 'Oh, we don't trade in such stuff. We trade in meat, butter and cheese.' "

"But what has it got to do with you?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Golyshev, raising his brows and no longer laugh-

ing and smiling. "If they starve, we will have to feed them, nobody else will. There's a small factory in the town where I am, and the workers are getting little food. As Chief of the Garrison I called them together and said to them: 'You ought to start a farm and grow food for yourselves. What's your trade union doing?' But they answered: 'There's nothing in our trade union rules about organizing farms, Herr Major.' 'Well suppose there isn't,' I said. 'Do it without the rules. You'll have food to eat.' But they said: 'If we rent land it will cost a lot of money, and we can't get land for nothing.' 'But your land is lying idle,' I said. 'That's not our business. Let the owners worry about that,' they said. 'But you'll starve,' I said. 'We are starving as it is,' they answered. That is why I told you then that I would like to remain here for a time."

Goreva listened to him without interrupting, undoubtedly ashamed that she was not feeling what Golyshev was feeling. To be quite frank, she regarded all the people here as enemies, and she was so fed up with life here that the fate of Austria did not interest her in the least.

"We would be much more useful at

home!" she said. "I envy you, Golyshev. You show such childish interest in everything in the world that I feel like an old woman beside you."

Golyshev maintained a resentful silence.

The car raced past now darkened fields bordered by gardens or divided by neat ponds and small lakes. It dashed through villages that looked like summer resorts. Our men were dancing by the roadside. Girls were whirling in a waltz under the approving gaze of our truck drivers from a column that had halted.

Women with rucksacks on their backs were collecting firewood in the near-by woods. Some young people in blue berets and bright capes were jointly smoking a single cigarette, indifferent to everything in the world.

Goreva wanted to ask Golyshev about Voropayev, but she was afraid that this would give rise to a frank talk, and she knew that there was nothing unpleasanter and harder to bear than an unhappy woman.

"I will put in an application to be sent to Moscow," she reflected sadly. "Let Europe take care of itself. I have nothing to do here. I feel lonely here."

* * *

The events that succeeded the surrender of Germany and which had radically changed the relations not only between the countries that had formed the Hitler state, but also between the classes in each of those countries, were still chaotic and indefinite.

Fascism was derailed like a train running at full speed, and the field of its disaster was still smoking and groaning. It was hard to say what had survived in the wrecked states, what parts of their mechanisms had been completely put out of commission and what parts were idly revolving like the wheels of an overturned locomotive.

All that which astonished Goreva in the streets of Vienna—the huge crowds streaming from all parts carrying bundles, wheeling handcarts and riding bicycles; the search for lost relations; the idlers in the gardens and parks even on workdays; the acute interest in rumours about the morrow and the impromptu meetings in the streets—all this was a reflection of the disturbance in the spiritual life of the people. From early morning people came running to the Altmans to have a chat and, as if casually, to enquire what Goreva's opinion was about a thousand things of the most diverse character. Will German

marks remain in currency? To whom will Austria belong? Should they take in a stock of food? Will the Serbians living in Vienna receive Yugoslav citizenship? Where and how could the works of Lenin and Stalin be obtained?

Viennese musicians copied music borrowed from the bandmasters of divisional bands. Whole streets rushed to see the Soviet cinema films, and at night somebody chalked the swastika on the Commandant's announcements with charcoal. Buildings that had long been demined suddenly burst into flames. A crowd of women dragged a disguised SS-man. People released from concentration camps roamed the streets with tear-stained faces and the flags of their respective countries sewn on their breasts.

Goreva had occasion to be in a camp for foreign workers who had been forcibly brought here from all parts of Europe. Here only convalescents and people seeking their relatives now remained. And here too she saw all that which was so characteristic of Vienna. What could these people who were about to leave this hated alien country have to argue about? Nevertheless, noisy meetings went on even when food was being handed

out. The sick pushed their beds closer together and wrangled without end, and every political discussion inevitably ended in a scrap.

The rout of fascism was a revolution for the toilers who had been released from slavery. Italian radicals united with like-minded Czechs and Frenchmen. Conservative Czechs and Frenchmen grouped themselves separately. Friendships were formed, sealed with handshakes not recorded in any minutes and obliterating state frontiers.

A great but by no means pacific ocean of new human relationships flooded Europe, which was rising from her knees. There was something to dream and to argue about for those who had miraculously survived the SS concentration camps, and for those who had miraculously escaped them because fascism had been routed.

But even when she realized what was going on Goreva felt no relief.

The Germans were so alien to her that she could not, like Golyshev, become interested in their affairs. She spent hours at her dressing station, at the operating table, fully content with her work without any desire to emerge from the circle of her interests.

The thought of returning home recurred to her more and more often. Her homesickness was prompted by a longing for the people who thought as she thought, for a way of life that did not and could not exist here.

* * *

Several days later she was already in the cabin of an airplane bound for Bucharest and thence for Kiev.

Hungary seemed a tiny country. On arriving in Bucharest she found the city ablaze with flags, posters and slogans and the streets teeming with crowds listening to speakers on motor trucks, impromptu street-corner meetings and the excitement that always presages some portentous event.

The city was rapidly forgetting the recent war, in the same way as one tries to forget actions that don't seem quite decent. People repudiate them as if somebody else had committed them.

The shops, loaded with goods which nobody was buying, looked like art exhibitions. Women's dresses were astonishing for their novelty. Scented males with coal-black eyes looked as sleek as if they had been varnished before leaving home.

New American films were already being shown in the cinemas. The walls of houses were plastered with concert announcements.

Goreva distrusted the gaiety of Bucharest. The grass had not yet sprouted on the battlefields, and the soldiers who had fallen on those fields had not yet received decent burial.

But the moment the airplane rose above the city and set course for Kiev, she stopped thinking about all this.

It was a hot day with rain on the horizon. Great masses of cloud barred the right edge of the sky. Huge, steep and mountainlike, they looked like a mirage of a snowy range, of a huge, boundless country peeping from the depths of a vast plain.

Ahead lay the Ukraine, and the clouds and the rain already looked Ukrainian, not alien.

But Europe was fated to enter Goreva's mind once again. In the airplane, bound for Moscow, was a group of Bulgarians, three Rumanians and, as Goreva supposed, an Italian, but actually a Dalmatian with a face as grim as a battlefield.

He was an elderly man, and the uneasy, censorious look in his amber-coloured, owl-

like eyes was cruel and hard; his face, tight-drawn like a fist and with tensed muscles, was threatening to everybody who spoke to him. It transpired that the Dalmatian was distantly related to the family of the famous Counts Voinovich, one of whom had been an Admiral of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and after whom the Graff* Wharf in Sevastopol is named to this day, and another had been a celebrated historian in his country. Goreva's fellow passenger, Bojidar Voinovich, was also a historian.

Bellicosely contracting and releasing the muscles of his pugnacious face he showed her his book on ancient Ragusa, Dubrovnik, the Yugoslav Venice, and informed her that he was going to Moscow to deliver a series of lectures on the Slavonic Adriatic.

When speaking he emphasized the first syllables of his words, which sometimes obscured their meaning, but the stern rhythm of his speech gained thereby.

As soon as he began to speak about Dubrovnik he forgot about everything else in the world and loudly urged the necessity of paying special attention to Dalmatia.

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* Graff—Count.—*Tr.*

He said that, having grown up closer to Rome than all other nations, but having never bowed down to her, having never sold their souls to the enemy, the Dalmatians had preserved the beauty and charm of Slav culture in its purest form.

He said that later Italy, after losing the whole of her Renaissance heritage, had for centuries given out as her own what had never belonged to her, that Slav blood had imperceptibly impregnated many of Italy's great treasures.

He got up from his seat and lurching in unison with the pitching of the airplane walked down the cabin, displaying photographs with the pride of an artist, as if Dalmatia were his own production.

"Look! This is our architecture!"

"Look! These are our costumes!"

"Look! These are our faces!"

On learning that Goreva had taken part in the capture of Vienna, he fired hundreds of questions at her.

"Is the Jesuit Library intact? Is the Oriental Institute intact?"

"Oh, the toads!" he groaned. "Jackals!"

He hated Vienna as if it were a living thing.

* * *

Intact? It made him furious. Thousands of peaceful and noble cities had been wiped off the face of the earth, but this low courtezan, this whore, this paramour of executioners has got off only with a fright.

"Proosia!" he shouted, waving his long, hairy hands. "She is arms! She is legs! She is buttocks! But dear Vyenna—she is philosophy! She made the pus of Proosianism into pastry. She turned the Proosian marches into waltzes. She clothed the ravings of the junkers in foggy phrases. Germany is the prose, Austria the poetry of Germanism. Oh, accursed one!" he roared. "A womb that bore worms.... All intriguers were born in Austria!"

The Bulgarians were infected by his wrath and applauded the battle fought by his prophet's face.

"Oh, that Vyenna.... I... I'd swallow her, bones and all.... A people that has produced Hitler cannot expect anything good from history."

In the endeavour to pacify the old man Goreva remarked that everywhere there were clever and stupid people, evil and good ones....

The old man contracted his face for a terrific blow.

"Evil! . . . Clever! . . . Are you not ashamed? Churchill too . . . oh! Clever, eh! Cleverness, so to speak, worse than stupidity."

Perspiration of hatred rolled down the old man's face.

The Bulgarians opened a bottle of wine and offered the first glass to Voinovich.

He accepted the glass with the gnarled hand of a ploughman rather than that of a historian and raised it above his head.

"There is a legend among us that Lenin, on departing from us, left Stalin a behest to unite the Slavs. There are many rumours about this behest and ballads have already appeared about it."

He broke off a piece of the bread the Bulgarians had in their parcel and drinking the wine, ate the bread after it.

"Let that legend come true! May the Slavonic lands unite! May our path be one!. . ."

The Dalmatian's stern fervour affected Goreva. She was on the verge of tears.

Here she regretted that she had left the battlefield before the battle was over, but that battlefield was now far away.

And sadness overcame her at the thought that after fighting through four countries she

had not brought away anything that she herself needed for her own life.

"Perhaps it is because I was too passive? Because I did not rake the dung heap of their lives in search of pearls? Because I could not find the key to their minds?..."

But recalling the Altman family, Duke Joseph, that Doctor of Philosophy Liebersmut, the palace guide at Schönbrunn and many others she had come in contact with, she remembered that they were all monotonously alike, as if afflicted with the same disease. Opium smokers—that is what they seemed to her to be.

All of them traded in the drug of illusions that were remote from life, all wanted easy success and great joys without pondering over how these can be attained.

After surrendering to Hitler they regarded themselves as martyrs. On being liberated they demanded special consideration for themselves.

Not having yet risen from their knees after their shameful captivity, their faces still wet with tears of sorrow for their fugitive master, they flaunted their wretched humility towards the victors and were already putting out their hands for alms, dancing in cafés,

singing in theatres, playing in beer halls, ready to serve the firstcomer for a spoonful of eggpowder or a pinch of tobacco.

They were omnivorous creatures without backbones, without muscles, content with mediocre felicity, formic interests and gemmaceous passions.

But where was that Europe about which Herzen had written with such manly respect and which Turgenev had loved so tenderly? That Europe she had not seen.

The great works of art stood in solitude in museums, monuments to an epoch that had vanished as completely as Atlantida. And the pigmies who fussed around the great treasures vowed that they were their inheritors.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The autumn was wonderful.

It tired one with sultry heat that knew no tiredness. The trees stood in torpor heavily drooping their fruit-laden branches and, like fading bouquets, giving off the humid scent of fresh, sun-warmed hay.

The vegetable plots exhaled a spicy, intoxicating aroma. Pungent odours were wafted from the brick walls of houses.

These smells hovered like midgets over everything that lived. The birds were silent, the wind was still, the air was torrid from intoxicating sunshine. The earth retained its heat until the dawn of the next day. A red glare hung over the horizon day and night as if something were perpetually burning far out at sea.

At night the over-ripe melons burst with a startling crack, scattering the raw mess of their seeds with an extravagant force that

vaguely reminded one of the happy time of harvest, love, weddings and prewinter repose.

The sweet scent of grapes and figs pervaded the interiors of houses and everybody felt sticky, sweet and slightly intoxicated from the heat.

Now that the flowers had gone, the eye feasted on the roofs, the slopes of which were decorated with early pumpkins of pink and orange colour, with bright-yellow melons, red strings of peppers, dark, blood-coloured patches of cornelian cherries spread out on pieces of linen, coral heaps of wild-rose berries, dark-blue sloes, greenish-yellow and black strings of figs and dark-brown balls of pomegranate.

The roofs sparkled with colour like a painter's palette, and only a rare brush could reproduce the charming abundance and beauty of the tones with which these autumn habitations were crowned.

In the beginning of September the people at the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz were expecting a new propagandist, Yuri Podnebesko, who had recently graduated from the propagandists' school and had not been in his kolkhoz since the spring.

He was to arrive in the Voropayev manner, that is to say, before dawn, before the work at the farm had begun, and Victor Ogarnov got up at three in the morning to meet him and conduct him to his brigade.

Varvara was still asleep on a mattress laid out under the lilac bushes, snoring softly in a dull, monotonous tone. Suddenly she stopped snoring, awoke, got up and, tidying her hair, walked down the moonlit garden.

"People say that the moon is cooling. Nothing of the kind, it doesn't cool a bit," she said languidly, wearily raising her arms as if wishing to cast off her skin like a tight chemise.

"Let me go, for God's sake, let me go, Victor. I'll go to Siberia, anywhere," she whispered, and the rattle of a bucket and the splash of water in the kitchen indicated that she was vigorously dousing herself with water there, breathing hard and grumbling.

"I'm wasting away," she growled. "I've lost three and three-quarter kilos. Scandalous, by God it is! I was so white and clean and good to look at, but now! Do you hear, Victor?"

He felt no inclination to reply. The light breeze announcing the dawn groped through

and rustled the leaves. The air became slightly cooler. Somebody's cautious footsteps gliding over the stony road roused the dogs on the outskirts of the village. The footsteps ascended the terraced street.

"Don't forget you are undressed, so don't go running out and showing yourself to people naked."

"There'll be no harm done if I do. What do I care about your people?"

Somebody firmly pushed the wicket gate.

"Who's there?" Ogarnov enquired, pulling up his shorts.

"Hello, Victor!" a familiar voice answered, and Yuri's tall, boyishly slender figure stood out distinctly on the road.

"Yuri? Varya, Yurka has arrived!" shouted Ogarnov almost in a frenzy, and before his words had left his lips Varya, half-dressed, dashed out of the porch and danced around the guest.

Yuri spread out his arms in amazement.

"I'm dressed, Yurochka, don't stare at me like that!" she cried out, holding a sheet in front of her like a shield with one hand and embracing Podnebesko with her other arm.

"How's Natasha? Is she well? And your little daughter? Have you brought a photo-

graph? Ekh, you duffer! Calls himself a father!"

Ogarnov, standing at a little distance and scratching his chin disconcertedly, laughed and said:

"You've forgotten what she's like, eh? She's bewitched. You can't change her nohow. Let him alone now, Varya. It's a disgrace! Better run and get breakfast ready."

Protecting herself with the sheet from the imaginary glances of Yuri who was looking into the distance over her head, Varvara vanished into the house.

The men sat down on the stone steps.

"Well, how are things here?" Podnebesko enquired.

"Pushing along," answered Victor indefinitely. "Did you see Voropayev?"

"Don't talk to me about that devil, I could kill him!" shouted Varvara from the house. "A regular artist! I'd tell him to his face: since he's become a boss he doesn't show his nose here!"

Yuri waited until Varvara stopped shouting.

"No, I didn't see him, but I talked to him over the telephone," he told Ogarnov. "He's up to his neck in work, gets no time even to sleep."

"What's heard about our Allies?" Ogarnov enquired. "Sergei Konstantinovich was here a little while ago and gave us a talk. He said that the English were playing sly. According to what he said it seems they are dissatisfied. They're all at sixes and sevens, is that right?"

Podnebesko was not prepared to answer that question, but he knew that a propagandist had no right to evade any discussion and so they began to talk about what troubled everybody most—the outcome of the victory.

Varvara, in a light frock that clung to her heated body, came out bearing a tray.

"Oh, you too have become a boss, Yurochka, and talk only about politics."

She deftly placed the tray on an upturned bucket, and squatted down and grasped her large, pink, rough-skinned knees with her hands. He sighed.

"Tell me how he's getting on with Lenka. You lodge with her, don't you? So you've taken over Voropayev's job in all departments, eh?" She chuckled and loudly slapped her knees from the excitement that overfilled her body.

"We are living at Elena Petrovna's place so far," answered Yuri. "You don't know how

grateful we are to her. I was at school and Natasha was about to have the baby, and we were in a hell of a hole. But upon my word, Elena Petrovna behaved like a sister to us. She took Natasha in, took her to the maternity home and brought her back.... She was so helpful, so helpful!"

"Why shouldn't she be when there's something to be gained by it?" said Varvara, although she knew perfectly well that Lena liked Natasha Podnebesko and had helped her disinterestedly. "I know Lenka, she's a smart one. She wouldn't miss a good thing. Is it all up between her and Voropayev?"

Podnebesko glanced at Victor to seek his support, but the latter hung his head and said nothing.

"I don't know, Varya; I didn't enquire," he answered, picking the largest tomato from the tray and, without salting it, biting into it like an apple. "But there's one thing I'll tell you: Elena Petrovna is a saintly woman.... What's this a 'Pride of the Market'? It's so sweet."

"One of Tsimbal's productions," Victor told him. "He wants to call it 'Victory.' What flesh, what flesh it's got! Juicy, isn't it?"

"All such saints think about is how to catch a husband," said Varvara. "I noticed her interest last winter."

Yuri was wearied by this needless and repugnant talk and tried to put a stop to it.

"Vitaminich's little boy is staying with her," he said, smacking his lips.

"What do you mean, with her?" the Ogarnovs asked in one voice.

"Yes, with her. Vitaminich got a room in town and, of course, he took his little boy with him with the intention of sending him to Maria Bogdanovna's sanatorium for the summer. But Elena Petrovna wouldn't hear of it; she took the boy home and now she's looking after him."

"Oh, that's only her artfulness! She'll get round him that way, take my word for it, Yurochka!" said Varvara, vigorously shaking Yuri's arm.

Varvara was totally incapable of understanding how complex Lena's life had become, and it was easiest of all for her to assume that Lena's actions were prompted by the same voracious impulses that prompted herself.

Already in the spring when, against his wishes, he took Korytov's place at the District

Party Committee, Alexei Veniaminovich seemed to have given up all thought of arranging his own private life. His books still weighted the bookshelves in Sophia Ivanovna's house, in the upper rooms now occupied by the Podnebeskos. Sometimes he would sit there for hours taking notes or translating something from English. Outwardly, his relations with Lena had remained unchanged and Sophia Ivanovna continued to get his rations for him.

When his work detained him at the house he willingly stayed for supper or to drink tea, but at night he always went to his room in town which was unfurnished, except for a camp bed and a small table.

He now no longer felt the need for a home because, as a matter of fact, the entire district had become his home. He convened conferences at Chumandrin's sovkhoz as readily as he did at Tsimbal's. He disliked calling people together at the District Committee and arranged every meeting at a different place. He even called some of the meetings of the Bureau of the District Committee at the headquarters of the kolkhoz Party organizations—a practice which shocked the Regional Committee instructors and roused holy horror among the local Party secretaries.

In the beginning of the summer he "got into the saddle" at Tsimbal's sovkhoz and did not leave it until he was convinced that the new undertaking was on the way to success. The drought drove him to the upper reaches of the rivers, deep into the mountain gorges where reservoirs were being built. He visited the kolkhozes and the schools where the people he needed were being trained. He seemed to be gathering a harvest out of himself.

He woke up at the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz; at midday he was giving a talk in the vineyards at the *Pervomaisky* or *Mikoyan*; he spent the afternoon either at the *Third International*, the *Schastlivy* or the *Krasnoarmeisky* Kolkhoz, and at night was seen in the warehouse at Chumandrin's sovkhoz talking to the wine makers.

At the fishing kolkhoz there was a book he had not finished reading; at Maria Bogdanovna's there was an article he had not finished writing, and at Tsimbal's there was a forgotten towel. His home was everywhere. Nobody could tell where he would meet or end the day. He was expected in all places at once, and everywhere he was needed.

Andrei Platonich Sukhov, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the District Soviet,

a sly Orelian, had been accustomed to ring up Korytov every morning and in an affected, unctuous voice say:

"I wish you good morning, Gennadi Alexandrovich. Bless the coming day, your Reverence. Have you any instructions for me?"

Now Sukhov saw, or rather heard, Voropayev, over the telephone, about twenty times a day, but he no longer asked for instructions, everything was already perfectly clear. Late every night they would discuss the plans for the ensuing day and arrange where each would be, and they easily found each other on the telephone, or would be racing to meet each other on horseback, in gigs or trucks to have a fifteen minutes' talk and part for another day or more.

* * *

"What's this I hear, Yuri? They say that Voropayev is concentrating his attention on the schools. The graduates told me about it," said Victor Ogarnov.

"He's got big things in his head. He wants to train specialists from among the young people here. He took Tsimbal, Shirokogorov and Gorodtsov with him to report on the matter and spoke on it himself. And the young

folks have jumped at the idea. Consider it yourself. Where's the sense in my going to some college outside the district, and when I've finished, be sent to work in some other district?"

"That's true. But what else is there to do?"

"Tsimbal is providing a stipend and Shirokogorov is taking student apprentices."

"Where is Tsimbal now, Yurochka?" enquired Varvara from the house.

"He's been put in charge of the new olive sovkhoz, the *Pioneer*. The old man is in his glory!"

"Promotion makes everybody young," remarked Victor. "But what about the stipends."

"The graduates have jumped at Voropayev's plan."

"I should imagine they would! Tsimbal is taking three, and so is Gorodtsov. His kolkhoz has set aside a special fund for this."

"You ought to take advantage of that, Yuri."

"I?" retorted Podnebesko laughing. "I could never get away now."

Yuri did not tell him about the almost terrifying attention which Voropayev was paying to the lectures delivered by his young promotee. He would turn up in the middle of one of

these lectures, listen to Podnebesko's timid narrative and go away without saying a word, and about two days later, when they found themselves alone somewhere, he would show him by mimicry what he had looked like and what utter nonsense he had talked when he should have said something else, and would then repeat Yuri's lecture with such brilliance that the latter could only listen and bite his lips with vexation.

"He'll drive the guts out of me, but he won't let me go," he said, not with regret but with pride.

While they were breakfasting and talking it became quite light. The autumn dawn in the South is long drawn out and passes imperceptibly into morning.

"So you say that Alexei Veniaminovich's little boy is with Lena?" said Victor with a kindly smile, for his thoughts were still hovering around Voropayev's personal life. "What a fine woman she has turned out!"

"They'd do a good thing if they gave her some kind of a stipend and she'd go away out of his sight," remarked Varvara patronizingly.

"That's what Elena Petrovna intended to do at first, but then she changed her mind,"

answered Yuri. "Where could she go, and why should she? Everybody knows her and respects her, and besides, she's sorry for Voropayev. I tell you, Varya, it makes your heart bleed when you see him running in to see Seryozha in the morning. He takes him by the hand and goes into the garden with him, tells him what business he has on hand, whom he is going to see that day and what he is going to do."

"Does the boy look like him?" Varvara enquired.

"Yes. He's a bright little kid. Reads the newspaper to Sophia Ivanovna every morning and sings songs with Tanyushka. He worships his father. And Alexei Veniaminovich has become a different man, milder and kinder, not what he was like before. Only he lives a gypsy sort of life, and what we can do to help him I am sure I don't know."

"It's his own fault," said Varvara, getting up and stretching herself. "What are you going to talk to us about today, Yurochka?"

"I would like to talk about the one-hectare system, Varya."

Varya opened her eyes wide, which she thought made her irresistible.

"Oh, my poor boy, he wants a one-hectare girl," she drawled mincingly. "Come to my

team and I'll show you how to start," she added affectionately, patting Yuri's cheek. "Your Voropayev wouldn't go about it that way."

Yuri, who was never able to tell whether Varvara was serious or joking, became curious.

"Well how? Tell me, do tell me."

"He would start with one, well, say with me.... Don't blink like that, bother you!" she said scoldingly to Victor. "How jealous he's become, to be sure! Well, he'd start with me and tell me the tale: what a fine woman I am, this and that, I've got lots of reserves, and so on, and he'd work me up so that I'd take not one but two hectares, and then I'd go strutting from team to team as proud as a peacock teasing all my competitors. And at night he would c-e-r-tainly deliver a lecture about me. Ekh!" she exclaimed saucily. "After all, he's a nice man is Voropayev. If I hadn't got Victor, I'd have dragged him to the altar long ago, 'pon my word I would. Well, I don't know about you, but it's time for me to go."

Varvara ran off, and Victor and Yuri also made ready to go to the office.

* * *

Yuri had intended his talk to last about twenty-five minutes, but he spoke much longer. This one-hectare movement was not a simple matter. It called for expert knowledge in winegrowing, and few of the kolkhoz women could boast of that. The grape picking at the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz fluctuated considerably. Ludmila Kashkina's team, the best in the kolkhoz, and from which much was expected, had been lagging behind for the second day, although they were doing only selective picking at present and the pace had not yet become intense.

Yuri decided to go to Ludmila Kashkina's plot and stay there until midday.

The vineyards of the *Pervomaisky* Kolkhoz ran over three broad hills down to the seashore. These were the vineyards in which Voropayev had led the assault in the winter.

The picking had already commenced. The dry morning with its pleasant breeze was favourable for it. The grape pickers wearing large straw hats or bonnets made from vine leaves and white and pink singlets or blouses, darted between the rows.

The scalloped leaves, touched here and there with red and gold, framed the girls' faces like the prettiest of their fruit. The

grapes gleamed like dull drops of sun. Bees hummed busily all around. The smell of the sweet juice of crushed grapes pervaded the air.

Whatever the eye rested on was amazing for its colour, of which there was too much on each object; but most striking and beautiful were the figures of the girls, and Yuri was sorry that Natasha was not among them.

The carriers with baskets and sieves loaded with grapes on their heads cheerfully called to each other.

Ludmila Kashkina, a short, sturdily-built girl with a "bunny" figure, with a piece of cigarette paper on her peeling nose and a paper triangle hat on her head, her sunburnt body covered only by a singlet and shorts, looked like a stout little boy. She was in that excellent mood that envelops a young person during athletic competitions when there is no shame in running in shorts and singlets under the gaze of thousands of eyes and when the youthful body frisks unashamed, expressing itself in the freest and most graceful movements different from those of every day.

She ran to meet Podnebesko as if posing to the sun, her arms outstretched like wings

and playfully watching her own shadow which resembled an airplane. She was nineteen, extremely fond of herself, convinced that everybody in the world liked her too.

"The Claret is fine this year," said Ogarnov, nodding towards a bush bearing beautiful, soft, winged bunches of amber-yellow grapes. "A splendid crop."

Podnebesko nodded mute agreement; he was not well up enough in the art of wine-growing to express an opinion.

"Everything looks fine this year," he said evasively. As Kashkina came running towards him he asked her: "What have you got there? The chairman says it's Claret."

"It's Claret all right, but what's the use of it?" she answered, exposing her large, gleaming teeth. "I'm glad you've come," she added, tugging at Yuri's leather belt as if to see whether it was too tight. "I wanted to go and see you. Come and see how things are here," and she dragged him by the belt to the scales that were standing near a shack.

Kashkina complained that the main crop on her plot was Muscat, but there were other varieties too. The weighman, however, booked them all as Muscat, and so no account was being kept of the other varieties.

"The main crop on Varya Ogarnova's plot are Pedro Ximenes, but the devils book Aléatico and Catalogne under that name too!"

The *Pervomaisky* vineyards had been formed from a number of small private vineyards in which there had been a little of everything, and the multiplicity of varieties, which had not mattered before, was now a nuisance, as the crop from these vineyards was delivered for special brands of wine.

The weighman, an old winegrower with a hard face like a callus, angrily denied Kashkina's complaint, but from the bosom of her sweat-moistened singlet she drew a damp, yellow scrap of paper on which was drawn a plan showing how the different varieties of grapes were distributed over the vineyards, and she loudly argued that the weighing should be organized differently, and that even the picking teams should be organized according to varieties.

Yuri and Ogarnov sat down near the shack to consider how best to rectify the error at once.

"How is it you have paid no attention to her complaint before, Victor? That's why she's lagging behind. She's right about that."

Victor shrugged his shoulders guiltily. He

had not yet learned the business sufficiently and trusted the old hands.

The weighman, feeling more guilty than anybody else, tried to prove that the mistake had been accidental.

The old man's fingers glided over bunches of pink Muscat, bright-red in the shade and almost black in the sun; he fingered the pinkish ashen-grey Pinot-gris grapes and stroked the violet Malbecks and the blue-black thick-skinned Cabernets that looked like bunches of beads. He smiled as he glanced at them. He was reluctant to part with them; he was sorry that they would be taken from him.

"I've been growing grapes for forty-five years," he said in an apologetic tone. "They are real clever plants, by God, they are. They can almost talk."

He cast a side glance at Podnebesko to see whether he was laughing, but the latter was listening gravely to him.

But Ogarnov said with a coarse laugh:

"It's a good thing they can't talk. If they could you'd hear something to make your ears tingle."

Still, the matter had to be settled at once, and not knowing what to do, Yuri decided then and there to go and consult Shirokogorov.

The fact that he was only a propagandist did not, according to Voropayev's rules, relieve him of responsibility for failures and blunders that he had witnessed.

But Shirokogorov was not at the sovkhoz.

He had gone to the *Mikoyan* Kolkhoz on a telephone call from Voropayev. A couple of days ago Gorodtsov had caused a terrific row at the District Land Department and had called the officials there parasites and idlers; and the day before he had threatened to go for the district agronomist for revealing a "Right deviation." Sukhov had received long written statements from the District Land Department officials and from Gorodtsov and they were now in his desk. Although the matter was not of exceptional interest and seemed to be an ordinary squabble, Voropayev wanted to get "to the root" of it and had asked Shirokogorov, who was very friendly with Gorodtsov, to enquire into it and find out the cause of the mess and what had started the row.

The *Mikoyan* Kolkhoz was situated in a valley with tall sides like a deep bowl. It was a warm place, sheltered from the wind. Here the most exacting varieties of grapes and the finest varieties of tobacco could be successfully grown, but the kolkhoz had not yet come to

the forefront as regards choice of crops. The tobacco plantations were entirely occupied by "American" tobacco instead of "Dubec" and the vineyards with cheap varieties of grapes.

The private vegetable gardens were so small that, as the kolkhozniks said, "a calf had no room to brush the dust off its nose," and so a large plot of land that had been prepared for grapes had to be used for growing vegetables. The poultry farm which had been set up by the efforts of the elderly kolkhoz women "was sitting on the neck" of the hotbed frames.

The idea had arisen in Gorodtsov's restless mind to "reshuffle" the whole farm, and he had submitted his plan of reorganization to a general meeting of the kolkhoz. He proposed that of the sixteen varieties of grapes that were growing in the vineyards only nine be left, chiefly Muscat and Tokay, the rest to be ruthlessly uprooted; that in the new year "Dubec" be planted instead of "American," that the vegetable plot be liquidated and the land used for planting roses for essential oil, and that the poultry farm be abolished. The District Land Department regarded Gorodtsov's proposal as a "Left deviation" and had prohibited the reorganization. Gorodtsov had launched a counterattack and had called the Land De-

partment officials "chin-waggers" and "self-insurance agents."

Shirokogorov learned all this during the very first quarter of an hour after his arrival at the kolkhoz while sitting on the flat, earthen roof of Gorodtsov's house which stood above the village like a command point.

"B-but!" Gorodtsov was saying to his visitor in his artilleryman's stentorian voice, scanning the valley from the roof. "B-but! Poultry must be handled in accordance with the lay of the land. Chickens in one zone, geese in another, turkeys in a third; each has its geography. Our geography here calls for avoidance of poultry. Poultry is not prized much here."

"Fresh eggs are very nice," answered Shirokogorov cautiously. "The more so that we are not well off for cows and we have no place at all to keep pigs. How can the kolkhozniks get on without chickens? And they can't do without vegetables, of course."

"This is my 'TASS refutation'," retorted Gorodtsov who was fond of using official terms and a political style of speech. "What vegetables have we got, I ask you? Tomatoes and eggplants. This is not Orel or Ryazan, my dear comrade, this is what they call the South,

subtropics. Give me southern crops. This is not a potato area according to scientific data."

Having grown accustomed during the war to shattering hundreds of houses and to wrecking scores of bridges, Gorodtsov was very free in the use of terms "uproot," "plough up" and "replan." He thought in terms of explosions. The preparation of the soil for grapes by means of explosives had a fascination for him as something in which he was quite at home. He would have liked to blow up everything here that was old, superfluous and obsolete—the wretched little vegetable plots, the poultry, and the cheap varieties of grapes—and reorganize the farm on the most up-to-date lines, to achieve complete prosperity, which was quite possible if the work were taken up seriously.

He would not wait. Procrastination, in his opinion, was fatal.

"I'm not putting my trust in God," he boomed, stroking his stiff moustache. "I am my own god according to scientific data. Tobacco, grapes and roses—and in three years we'll have a million rubles in the bank. For tobacco alone the teams will deposit forty thousand, and for roses twenty. What do I want the poultry for, then? When we've delivered the rose petals we can buy all the geese we want."

He would listen to no argument, he ignored them as if he were deaf, and in the end Shirokogorov was obliged to examine his plan for reorganizing the vineyards.

It was a carefully thought-out plan. By means of the layer method the Tokays and Muscats were to take the place of the Saperlavi, Rieslings and Cabernets. The kolkhozniks' houses were to be covered by creeping vines. Their vegetable plots were to be transformed into rose gardens. One of the small ravines was to be converted into a reservoir.

"Well, and if . . ." Gorodtsov took a deep breath with such force that the fine grey hair on Shirokogorov's head rose up on end, and leaned towards the speaker. "If you go against me, then I'll shoot at point-blank range. I want to have my five-year plan, and you can't deny me it. I want the *Mikoyan* to be a Red Flag kolkhoz. The Dance Troupe got a Red Flag, why hasn't a single kolkhoz got one? They ought to! What? They ought to, I say! What do you mean? I tell you . . ." he raved more and more fiercely, although Shirokogorov was not contradicting him. "What did we learn during the war? To study invisible targets. At times we didn't sleep for nights turning it over in our minds. But here!

By God, I'm like a lizard, they won't let me look into the distance! I tell you straight: my communiqué conflicts with yours! Give me a model prospect, that's what I'm asking for."

"But I'm not raising any objection," said Shirokogorov, smiling. "I'd turn everything here upside down myself if I had my way. You are right, but aren't you in a bit of a hurry?"

"Some go at a canter, others at a gallop. I go according to my data. Things will go better that way."

Shirokogorov was unable to expound his views at length so the conversation petered out without them reaching a definite conclusion and they arranged to meet at Voropayev's.

When Shirokogorov reached home and angrily related to Yuri the plans Gorodtsov had in mind, Yuri regretted very much that he had not been present during the conversation. There was nothing Voropayev despised so much in his assistants as lack of information, and he always demanded that they should march ahead of events and not wait for them to come to their desks.

"It is your duty to know the mood of the people before it takes shape in their minds," he would say.

Yuri was too late. An event had rolled up to him like an unexploded bomb.

"I'll go to Gorodtsov, study his plan and formulate my views for the report as an official of the District Committee."

Shirokogorov, however, advised him not to go and said that he had already grasped the whole matter.

"Gorodtsov is overdoing it, far too much. Think of it ... the vegetable plots are in his way! But I know what it springs from, of course. He is in a hurry to live."

"But taking the substance of the matter, is there a grain of truth in it?"

"Yes, there is, but ... is he right? Abstractly, yes. He is right. From the practical point of view, however, he is a Left-deviationist. And that is censured. We are fighting to have vegetable plots, but he.... He is wrong, of course."

Yuri was ashamed to look Shirokogorov in the face.

"What is good in general cannot be bad in particular," he began to argue timidly, not yet being able to contradict this old man who was such an authority on the subject. "We have two questions before us: one—overdoing it with the vegetable plots; the other—to develop a model kolkhoz, and that, in my opin-

ion is a correct idea. The only question is: will the *Mikoyan* be such a one? Let's think about it, Sergei Konstantinovich."

The old man raised his brows and stroked his head.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said. "The idea is correct. In the abstract. But in practice, it is devilishly hard to carry out. Eh? What do you think?"

"It is hard, but we've got to think about it some time. The poultry, of course, must be protected. And the vegetable plots too. The people are not getting enough food as yet. But on the other hand, it is high time to set about resorting the vineyards."

"That Gorodtsov is no fool," said Shirokogorov with a sly twinkle in his childlike eyes. "Incidentally, the *Mikoyan* occupies the best place in this district. And he's found that out, the cunning rascal!"

"No wonder the kolkhozniks call him 'Scorpion,' " said Podnebesko. "He's greedy, envious and smiles only when he is scolding. The secretary of their Party organization told me that when Gorodtsov took his first dip in the sea he laughed with delight and said: 'A good factor. Refreshing. Must take note of this.' "

"He hasn't put sea-bathing in his work schedule yet, has he? To improve production?"

"No, but he will. The people like him for all that."

"It's not surprising! He has brought his kolkhoz to the forefront, it wins all the banners and prizes and has brought honour for them all. . . . So we ought to back his idea, you say?. . . Strictly speaking, the idea is mine, I've had it for a long time, but he has anticipated, forestalled me, the rascal! And I have no grounds for complaint. He has snatched the idea from under my nose, and he's right. Such is life! And you," he continued, snapping his fingers, "you are a good lad for not being afraid to teach me a lesson since I'm so short-sighted. 'Happy is the land which takes such a man unto itself, ungrateful if it rejects him, unhappy if it loses him,' " he declaimed like an actor.

"Where's that from?"

"From Cicero."

"I must confess that I have never heard of him."

"Oh, I quoted it in order to be able to teach you something."

Yuri blushed and disconcertedly waving aside this praise hurried off to Voropayev.

* * *

After her stormy conversation with Voropayev, Lena's life resumed its former course. Now, far from wishing to change her way of life and break away from the people around her, she strove to bind herself to them with ties that nothing would be able to break in the future. Strange as it may seem, her rupture with Voropayev brought her relief. True, a vacuum was formed, but she wanted at once to fill this vacuum like a large, unfurnished room. That is how young layers shoot up after the gardener's knife has severed them from the maternal root. The catastrophe transforms them. The carelessness with which they had utilized the energy of the mother plant gives way to rapid self-strengthening. At no time afterwards do they display such artifice as they do now when, left to their own devices, they are faced with the question: to be or not to be?

This is what happened to Lena. Voropayev had taught her to think about many things and to achieve many things by her own efforts. Unhappy and lonely, she was now filled with vague hopes, as he had been when he first arrived here and, tormented by his wounds and ailments, homeless and bewildered, but possessed by a passion to live, had rushed at obsta-

cles as soon as they had appeared before him even at a distance.

The grief which her love for Voropayev had caused her roused in her a fierce desire to keep on her feet at all costs now that hopes of happiness had been lost.

The house came to life again. The spirit of activity once again pervaded the small rooms. The Podnebeskos moved into the upper floor. Tanya and Seryozha played and frolicked downstairs.

One Saturday evening, after supper, when it was time for everybody to retire, the dog barked and somebody hammered at the gate with a stone.

The children were already asleep. Sophia Ivanovna and Natasha were collecting the washing and Lena, busy washing up the dishes, did not at once notice that somebody was knocking at their house. But the knocking was repeated and Yuri, who was sitting nearest to the exit from the arbour, walked to the gate, pacifying the dog as he went.

"A-a-ah!... You are a welcome guest! Come in! Come in!" he was at once heard saying. The gate creaked and the footsteps of the unknown visitor were heard on the hard-packed ground of the yard.

It couldn't be Voropayev—no dog barked at him, and Naida recognized him from a distance; but Lena felt alarmed. Shading her eyes from the lamp, she peered into the darkness. Anna Stupina appeared near the arbour.

Lena had become attached to Anna because of what Voropayev had told her about her, but just now she was not glad of her arrival. For some reason she thought that Anna had come at Voropayev's request and that, therefore, something must have happened to him. All that she could find to say instead of a greeting was:

"Annushka, darling, where are you coming from?"

"Excuse me for coming so late," said Stupina disconcertedly, and then she hurriedly related that the District Committee of the Young Communist League had instructed her to go to Tsimbal's next day—a conference or a lecture, she herself was not sure what it was—but she had thought it convenient to spend the night in town so as to be able to start out earlier.

"Sit down, Anna, sit down!" said Yuri heartily, glancing at Lena and wondering what could have upset her. "Does Opanas Ivanich know where to send for you?"

"Yes. I saw him at the District Committee."

"Does Alexei Veniaminovich intend to go to Tsimbal's tomorrow?" continued Yuri, very jealous when other people had claims on Voropayev.

Lena, with downcast eyes, poured out some tea for Anna.

"No, I don't think so. He has been called to the Regional Committee. Thank you, Lena," said Anna, taking the cup of tea. "Wouldn't you like to come? Take the children and come! Opanas Ivanich told me to be sure and invite you."

Feeling reassured that Anna had not brought any bad news Lena livened up and without thinking long about it, consented. She was even pleased that Voropayev would not be there.

"Well, of course, why shouldn't I go? I am free tomorrow. Natasha!" she called, "Natasha, come here!"

But Anna and Yuri had already gone in to persuade Natasha to go and Lena was left alone.

She had been avoiding Voropayev recently because she felt guilty towards him. A fortnight ago the postman had handed her a

letter addressed to Goreva and returned with the mark: "addressee gone." Lena long held the tattered and crumpled envelope in her hand and then, without thinking of what she was doing, she opened it, withdrew the letter and, no longer able to restrain herself, read it to the end. Later she felt so ashamed of her conduct that she dared not confess it to Voropayev and did not give him the letter.

She knew the contents of that frightful letter almost by heart.

Voropayev had written Goreva, manfully and frankly, as one can write only to a person with whom one is very intimate, that his sense of his unfitness had compelled him to decide to go out of her life (that explained his silence), and that the whole of his present way of life confirmed the correctness of that decision. He had always been a wanderer. His wife had shared that life with him and it was doubtful whether she had been happy. "I could not think of you merely as a kind acquaintance, Shura. Since it has so happened that you cannot be at my side as the dearest person in the world to me, and I know perfectly well that this is impossible," he had written as if apologizing for the very thought of a possible

life together, "then it is of no use my thinking of you. What right have I to force my will, my interests, upon you? Probably there are other schemes of a happy life, but I don't know them, and, I must confess, would never accept them. Is this kind of thing for you?"

Recalling the words of Voropayev's letter, Lena rested the cup she was wiping on her knee and became lost in thought.

"He asks to be understood and forgiven because he loves her," she reflected. "Still, he must feel very lonely. Why are good people so rarely happy?... He is afraid of his own love, he is shy of it. Yes, he is a restless man, terribly restless. He takes everybody's troubles upon himself." The last sentence she uttered almost aloud.

"So it's agreed?" she heard Yuri say. "That's splendid!"

"Still, you might have told me earlier," Natasha protested. "Just think how much there is to do...."

Podnebesko and Anna Stupina, talking earnestly to each other, walked to the arbour.

"Oh, I've dropped my earclip!" shrieked Stupina. "Be careful, don't step on it!"

"Which one, the right or left?" enquired Lena.

"The right!"

"Well, you're going to get married, Annushka. Invite us to the wedding."

"You are dreaming!" answered Anna, fixing the recovered clip and hiding her blushing face with her elbow. "I've got more important things to think about."

* * *

At dawn an old one-and-a-half-ton truck, recently returned from the war, rattled up to Lena's house. In it were Boris Levitsky and Kostya Zaitsev, workers at the Y.C.L. District Committee. Lena, Anna, Tanya and Seryozha staidly sat down beside them on the wooden form. Sophia Ivanovna placed at their feet a basket containing flat cakes, cucumbers and tomatoes. Natasha with little Irochka sat with the driver. Yuri gazed at his wife and daughter with a beaming face as if he were delighted at being left in the house alone.

Although it was Sunday, there were signs of animation in the fields at the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz. Many of the teams had been working part of the night and here and there shacks made from corn straw could be seen. Lena,

who had got out of bed after a severe attack of grippe only the day before, felt a little ashamed as she passed her fellow kolkhozniks; she waved her hand to them and made signs to show why she was not with her team.

Beyond the kolkhoz land were the vegetable farms of the sanatoria and the city offices, higher up were the pastures, and to the right of them, on the slopes of the gorge that dropped between two mountains, were the adobe huts of Tsimbal's sovkhoz.

The mountainsides with the clumps of gnarled and crooked pine trees on the crags and the numerous glades and ravines overgrown with cornel, thorn and oak saplings, looked quite different from what they usually looked like from below.

There was not a single continuous line in the pattern of the mountains; they all seemed to be in motion, suggesting that they will be different tomorrow from what they were today.

To the right a strip of the sea came into view. The heaving sea surged towards the beach. A small, grey vessel was emitting smoke in Happy Bay and fishermen's boats were spread out in a beautiful curve, evidently laying the net.

Boris Levitsky said, pointing to the bay:

"If a new Voropayev comes here in three years' time to rent a house he will have to put his name down on the waiting list. There will be none available, and all the building lots will be occupied too."

"So far out?" said Lena in surprise.

"It's not so far. And what a wonderful place it is. Last Sunday Alexei Veniaminovich arranged a business excursion there. He invited engineers, business executives, physicians and some other experts from Moscow and for four hours they rambled over the rocks and the beach and afterwards there was almost a scrap when the building lots were distributed."

"Take care you are not too late, Anna," said Zaitsev. "By the time you become an agronomist, Tsimbal will have all this place cultivated and you'll have nothing to do."

"An agronomist? Are you going to college, Annushka?" Lena enquired enviously.

"I don't know whether I am or not. I can hardly believe it."

Lena was not aware that Tsimbal had been displaying extraordinary activity since he had been instructed to organize the *Pioneer* Olive Sovkhoz, and that he had obtained permission to have a group of young student apprentices.

His idea was to send the young people to college later on at the sovkhoz's expense and had made Annushka a formal proposal to this effect.

The Y.C.L.'ers laughingly declared that they were going to celebrate Anna's marriage to the sovkhoz and Zaitsev portrayed by mimicry what a hard life she would lead.

"Gorodtsov wanted to propose to her, but Tsimbal forestalled him, and Voropayev, who gave away the bride, favoured Tsimbal," said Levitsky, although he did not say that he himself had taken up the cudgels on Tsimbal's behalf.

The new sovkhoz was the creation of the Y.C.L.'ers. The patchwork sovkhoz spread out on waste plots and abandoned land and on the slopes of roadside hills and uninhabited gorges looked like a chapter of a thrilling novel. The idea had been suggested by Stalin, and everybody was eager to finish the book as quickly as possible. Zaitsev also was going to work for Tsimbal, and Levitsky was going to work for Shirokogorov.

"Good Lord, I'm the only one left out," said Lena with such a wry smile that everybody realized how bitter this thought must be to her.

Zaitsev tried to soothe her.

"Let me be matchmaker between you two today, will you? Shake hands then. Tsimbal is so greedy. He never has enough! I give you my word that in a couple of years he'll have us all roped in. We'll all be working on piecework for him."

"Fix it up then," answered Lena offering Zaitsev her hand. "Only I'm afraid my mother has got in before me. She has struck up a suspicious friendship with Opanas Ivanovich and doesn't say a word about it."

"So he's got round Sophia Ivanovna too, that's obvious."

"Tsimbal is capable of anything," said Levitsky. "He almost persuaded Korytov to come to him as assistant director."

That started a discussion about Korytov. What a life he had led then! How sick he had made them with his passion for circulars, instructions and meetings! But for all that they were sorry for him. He was an honest man, but was unable to keep pace with life and failed to realize this.

"What's he going to do now?" Anna enquired.

"He has gone to Moscow to study," answered Levitsky.

"Everybody is going to study, everybody. But I. . . ." she did not finish what she wanted to say.

Opanas Ivanovich was coming down the road to meet them, carrying a long shepherd's crook.

As soon as the truck stopped and they all got out, Tanya and Seryozha, ignoring the adults, ran to the roadside glades where there were still some green patches.

It was markedly cooler in the foothills than down by the sea. The grass had not yet withered, and here and there weary and no longer fragrant flowers could be seen.

Thin little Seryozhka, awkwardly, like a city-bred boy, went bravely chasing after a lizard which completely countryfied Tanya had run past with indifference. He, a northern, city-bred boy, went into raptures over everything his eyes discovered in this fabulous South. Tanya was more sober in her attitude towards nature and paid attention on'y to what attracted her at the given moment. The day before she had been given a butterfly net and she was now interested only in butterflies, which she saw, or imagined she saw, everywhere. She tried to catch with her net the longish, dark-red wild-rose berries and stamped

her feet and scolded when she caught her delicate instrument on the thorns.

"Let go! Let go, you naughty, nasty thing!" Flowers and stones were animate objects to her.

The visitors ascended a path to a little whitewashed house that served as the offices of the *Pioneer* Sovkhoz and also as Opanas Ivanovich's lodgings.

A table covered with a red cloth had been placed in the shade of an old pine tree, and around it were gathered the employees of the sovkhoz. Spread out on the table was a plan of the sovkhoz territory.

Tsimbal stepped up to the table and in an official tone, as if he were opening a meeting, he said:

"Two days ago we received permission to put you on our staff, Comrade Stupina. We have a specialist at present, but we must have specialists of our own training. So there!" he placed his heavy hand on the plan. "When you have finished high school you will go to college at our expense. What do we need? We need what the devil himself doesn't know where to find. Look at this! Fifty hectares of olives, forty hectares of figs, and also the hothouses. Is that right? Then there are the masses

of wild pears and apples in the woods. By the time you receive your training we will have the planting done and the water brought up. The question of agrotechniques will then arise."

He spread out his arms as if offering her the hill slopes. Anna looked at him with screwed-up eyes as if the words he was uttering were dazzling sunbeams.

"All yours," he continued. "I'll give you this plan as a keepsake, as it were. Study hard and come back an expert. Now come here!" and he kissed Anna three times, making the tears come to her eyes with confusion.

"Thank you for treating me like this," she said in a low voice. "Thank you, Comrades. I am so grateful that I don't know . . . but I'll say this . . . you won't be ashamed of me. You won't!"

Deeply moved himself, Opanas Ivanovich kissed the girl again.

"It's as if we are giving her in marriage to your *Pioneer* Sovkhoz," said Levitsky. "We ask you to love and cherish her, and we, the Y.C.L., promise to help her all we can."

"Oh, a marriage!" exclaimed Tsimbal. "That calls for a special ceremony. Hey, kiddies! Bring me some string and some bread, salt and pepper!"

Somebody at once gave him a length of string and, groaning, the old man got down on his knees and amidst general laughter tied the string to the legs of the table.

"That's what we used to do in Kuban in the olden days," he explained. "So that the young couple should live in harmony, to tie their interests together, so to speak."

Then he broke off a piece of flat cake, dipped it in the salt and pepper and with extreme solemnity placed it in Annushka's right hand, saying:

"I come to you with bread and salt and hope in me you'll find no fault. And pepper too to add the spice to make our lives so very nice," and with that he sat Anna down at the table beside himself.

"You must grasp science tightly in your hands, daughter. You remember what Ivan Zakharich, the gardener, told us, don't you? How Comrade Stalin spoke to him? Well then! In my opinion, daughter, scientists have to be trained from childhood, like the boys at the Suvorov School. Music and singing too, everything, is taught from childhood. But scientists they begin to train at the age of twenty-twenty-five. I think that's wrong."

Forgetting that the table had been laid, he began to talk enthusiastically about his plans for the future, about his idea of establishing a school for young gardeners whom later he would send to college and in this way have the sovkhozes and kolkhozes train their own scientists.

"You couldn't restrain yourself after all, Opanas Ivanovich, and delivered a lecture," said Zaitsev, interrupting. "Take care you don't frighten her, else she will run away."

And he sat down beside Anna with the obvious intention of diverting Tsimbal's attention from her.

He was ridiculously thin and ugly, but there was that purity of heart and assertiveness about him that attract girls much more than good looks. He was audacious, full of fun and sincere, and talked and laughed in such high-pitched tones that when he broke into his rollicking laughter it seemed that he was about to sing at the top of his voice.

Anna looked at him with beaming eyes. She liked him. Suddenly, just as she became completely absorbed in her incautious admiration, Zaitsev shot a glance at her and turned away.

But as soon as she began to talk to Lena she again felt the burning rays of his glance on her flushed cheek. At this moment, however, she thought of Voropayev and she became as sad as an orphan.

Suddenly everything seemed to her to be uninteresting and affected, and the merriment of the people she loved and respected only irritated her.

The dinner was to be a long and tedious one and she was nervous. And on top of it all there was this Zaitsev. His glance warmly brushed her cheek like a sunbeam and no doubt everybody noticed that the right side of her usually dark face was red.

* * *

Imperceptibly the autumn passed into winter. The evenings reminded one of the spring, they were endlessly long and so enchanting that people who usually paid no attention to nature involuntarily yielded to her charm.

On one of these festivallike days, a meeting of the active Party workers in the district was held. The results of the year's work were summed up. People and their work were appraised. Besides those whom everybody knew there were many who had only recently arrived

in the district, but they behaved without restraint as though they had always been here, but had not appeared in public for a time. They eagerly took part in the debate and talked sensibly. There had not been a stormy, restless but fruitful meeting like this for a long time.

The joy of victory in the war had not abated. On the contrary, it stimulated the people to bold exploration. Everybody was displeased with everybody else: Tsimbal demanded attention for his waste plots; Gorodtsov, repenting for his Left deviations, nevertheless insisted that model kolkhozes must be developed, and Guards Captain Serdyuk, retired, who had been dismissed from three jobs during this period, asserted that he alone was thinking of the district's future and that nobody understood him.

It had been a hard year, and having overcome it, the people rejoiced in their successes and, as often happens among us, this rejoicing was expressed in bitter regret that more had not been accomplished. Every speaker asserted that he could have done more had it not been for his neighbour.

Usually, Voropayev was fond of stirring up passion, but on this occasion he was

obliged to curb the militant ardour of the meeting. This happens at meetings at which the results of a battle are analyzed and it seems as though a reverse is being discussed when as a matter of fact it is a very considerable success.

The meeting had started in the morning and ended in the evening.

At the morning session Doctor Komkov had arranged with Gorodtsov that the latter would take him home in the *Mikoyan* cart, but when, after the meeting, he left the Hall of Culture and turned the corner where the *Mikoyan* stableman was to be waiting for him, he found that, in addition to the doctor and the two brigade leaders, Gorodtsov had left orders to "give a lift" also to propagandist Yuri Podnebesko It was evident to the doctor that there would not be room for all and that he would have to walk.

He stood at the corner from which he could see all the waiting motorcars and carts in the hope of meeting an acquaintance who would pick him up.

Very soon Tsimbal turned up and taking the doctor by the lapel of his coat at once began to expound his plan for growing medicinal herbs with which he had been pottering about

for the past few months. Being himself rather talkative and keen on every innovation, the doctor could not resist entering into the discussion in spite of the fact that he saw the last of the cars slipping away.

"How did you like Voropayev's summing up? Good, wasn't it?" was Tsimbal's parting question, but instead of parting they walked on arm-in-arm and discussed Voropayev.

"What he said was very interesting, but he looks simply awful," said Komkov, glancing over Tsimbal's shoulder to see whether some passing vehicle was going his way.

"We urged him to take a rest, but he shook his fist at us. 'If I took a rest I'd feel like a fish out of water,' he said."

Komkov said with an ironical smile:

"That's so . . . but. . . ."

At last they did part. Tsimbal returned to the Hall of Culture. Komkov had to go and see the chairman of the *Novoselo* Kolkhoz who was sick, so he took the street that led on to the highroad.

The road went uphill. Beyond the last houses of the town it turned abruptly westward and ran in sharp loops along the edge of a damp and narrow gorge almost to the crest of the mountain.

Down below it was already dark and the houses and streets merged in continuous grey patches with a few orange-coloured lights in each patch; but on the road, and above it, it was still light, and on the very crest of the mountain there was a pink glare from the last rays of the sun that was sinking behind the crest.

The figure of a woman slowly ascending the road had first looked like a dark cypress tree, but it grew lighter, assumed definite shape and became familiar down to the slightest detail. It even seemed strange that it should be possible in the early evening light to see the details of a dress so distinctly and to guess the features and whole carriage of a woman walking far in front.

Komkov guessed that it was Lena even before he recognized her.

Nobody else could combine rapidity of individual movements with general slowness. She always, as it were, made haste slowly. Komkov called to her. She was startled by the call and turned round slightly, but on recognizing Komkov she waved her hand in greeting and beckoned to him to catch up with her.

"Why are you on foot?" asked Komkov on drawing level with her.

"I get fed up with noise, somehow. But I am fond of walking, you know that!"

Yes, he did know it. In the spring, nearly every other day, she had walked from town to the *Kalinin* Kolkhoz—twenty-five kilometres there and back—to take a cheese cake and five apples to Voropayev.

They walked on in silence. Later, when they felt that they both wanted to talk about the same thing and that it was necessary, however hard it may be, to open the subject, Lena halted and looking enquiringly at the doctor asked in a dispassionate voice:

"Isn't that somebody calling us?"

From the town, down below, came a wave of muffled shouts as if somebody were singing at the top of his voice or, indeed, calling somebody.

As they listened to these sounds they could not help admiring the undulating valley that stretched before them below. Intersected by orchards and vineyards it was entirely visible to their eyes, and it looked as if it could be taken by the edges, lifted up and carried away.

"No, they are not calling us," said Komkov with just a hint of a smile, as usual. Preparing to talk about what troubled them both he was turning over in his mind, like hastily-jotted

notes, the impressions of that day in order to find the words he needed, but was unable to do so.

Lena waited obediently. All she could see was the haggard face of Voropayev at the chairman's table. He had spoken particularly well at this meeting, and even those he ridiculed or upbraided were not offended. He was like a doctor scolding a patient who failed to obey his orders; he threatened, but promised assistance.

On concluding his observations on the year's work he had gone on to talk about culture.

"Culture is a longing for beauty," he said. "It means training oneself to enjoy intellectual pursuits, and it is regrettable that we do not all desire this, that many of us even think that somebody or other will masticate this culture for us and feed us with the pap whenever it is required, as much as to say: we are ever so busy, so please, comrades, leaders, entertain us and teach us. But such a line of reasoning will bring you to the idea that the state ought to shave you, wash you and take you to the tailor and shoemaker."

He had stood next to the rostrum in not a new but well-pressed tunic and breeches and

shining parade top boots, the only costume he usually wore, but he had looked exceptionally spruce and solemn.

"I can't get Voropayev's speech out of my head," said Komkov suddenly without any preliminaries. "It was not a stereotyped speech, and you will see, it will be remembered for a long time."

Lena, who had long been waiting for this opening asked, also without any preliminaries:

"How is his health now?"

"You see. . . ."

"Tell me frankly."

"Voropayev is at the service of everybody. The organization is a complicated one. There is no cure for men like him. And they are not sick in the same way as other men are."

"He has got so thin."

"Thin? He is all bones. Even his heart."

"Oh no," and Lena walked on further.

"Last winter you said that a change was the best medicine for him. Well, he took a change," she said softly.

"The change was not complete enough. He should have added a little joy to it. I'll show you a very curious thing, shall I?" he said, suddenly changing the subject and inviting Lena to follow him. "Life is not like human rela-

tionships, there are fewer stereotyped patterns in it. Come! It's quite near here."

They took a few steps off the road, ran down a steep track, rounded a crag and came to a halt.

The land spread out below them like the wings of an airplane. They were standing on the steep edge of a huge rocky ledge. The mighty trunks of two sequoias leaned over the precipice, and it looked as if they had only to push away from the roots to go leaping into the air.

"Why, this is Eagle Peak!" said Lena. "I have often looked up to this place from down below. It reminds you of an eagle's nest. But I had no idea it was so beautiful. Isn't nature wonderful? You can't imagine anything more beautiful."

"It's not nature. Man made this," said Komkov.

"Really? Who?"

"That I don't know. But the traces of someone's vigorous life have been distinctly preserved. First of all, look at these sequoias. You see trees like this here only in good parks, they don't grow of their own accord. These could not have grown here without the aid of human hands, and skilled hands at that."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. Look how symmetrically they stand on the edges of this crevice. I suppose it was intended for a staircase."

Lena dropped to her knees and closely scrutinized the crevice. The pert new moon turned its light full on to the rock.

"Yes," she said, rising to her feet. "What you say is right. I even think that the crevice was cut by human hands. It is much too smooth to be natural."

"And now look here," said Komkov animatedly. "Look at this hewn stone buttress. What do you say to it? That definitely is not nature."

"Where was the house then?" Greatly interested by this extraordinary discovery, Lena looked round wonderingly. "Was there a house here or not?"

"That's the whole point! There was no house. It's no use looking for it. No house, nor even foundations. But there was a water pipe, imagine that!" The doctor groped at the base of a sequoia and picked up a fragment of clay piping.

"The pipe ran from under the mountain. I suspect the whole system was wrecked when the road was built, because no water

reaches the place now. But what an enormous amount of labour, what energy it must have cost!"

Lena wondered how old the fragment of pipe might be.

"Over fifty years," said Komkov, and pointing to the sequoias he added: "These lads must be eighty, and the water pipe cannot be younger, if it is not older."

"Perhaps somebody lived here two hundred years ago. It's worth writing to the newspaper about it."

"Who it could be I don't know, and I can't guess," said Komkov, spreading his arms out in bewilderment, "but I imagine it must have been a man who regarded beauty as a necessity. He climbed up to this ledge, became transfixed with rapture and said to himself: 'I will prepare this place for those who come after me.' And he set to work. Planted these trees, laid on water, thought of cutting a staircase in the rock, built this buttress. . . ."

Lena interrupted him:

"But why didn't he build himself a house?"

"Why? Very simple. Because it was impossible to live here at that time and he knew that he would not live to see the day when a road would be laid here and it would be not a

torture but a pleasure to live here. I can understand *him*; *he* knew perfectly well that he was not doing this for his own benefit. He simply erected a landmark for future generations, as much as to say: Look at this beautiful spot. He threw down a challenge to us as much as to say: Continue what I have started, finish it and enjoy it, and in that way linked his life with ours. . . ."

"Have you not enquired among the old inhabitants?"

"I have, but nobody remembers anybody living or preparing to live here. Nobody's name is even remotely connected with this place."

They walked to and fro on the ledge several times.

"And what are these bushes here?"

"They are mine," said Komkov. "I planted them. Pomegranate and olive. I wanted to contribute my share to the disinterested effort of the unknown builder and to bring life at least one step nearer to *his* place. We'll not recognize this ledge in twenty years' time. A magnificent sanatorium or a monument will be built here, and it will be visible from a great distance. The pioneer who started building here will, of course, be forgotten and

people will say that the building was put up all at once." Komkov spoke of this pioneer as if he were somebody very dear to him.

"There are people in the world like that, Lenochka, I assure you. Some of them become Michurins, others go out and discover new lands like Dezhnev, others again grow up and become Lomonosovs, and still others, without leaving home, without making discoveries, make bare rocks habitable, prepare them for their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I forgot to tell you that he must have dragged earth up here and planted vines. The vines have degenerated now and are barren, but they look like an old local variety, a descendant, probably, of the varieties that Homer's contemporaries brought here."

"Perhaps *he* too was an ancient?"—Lena opined.

"Oh no! he must have been a Russian. Nobody had seen sequoias here before the Russians came. Our grandfathers planted them here. And besides, the whole design, the very idea is purely Russian, audacious and challenging, as much as to say: here you are, dear descendants, this is what I have found and prepared for you, take it as a gift, enjoy it and be grateful."

"It would be a good thing if some institution became the patron of this place," said Lena with a thoughtful smile.

"Yes, it would. But I want you to think of this builder. Probably he was something like our Voropayev, don't you think so? He found this ledge, took note of it and set us this wonderful riddle, but he didn't build a house, nor even a hut, for himself!"

"But what does he need, Doctor? Tell me. At least whisper in my ear, what does he need?" pleaded Lena, meaning Voropayev.

"I have already told you. A little joy wouldn't do Voropayev any harm.... But really I don't know. I am not yet able to handle characters like that. In my opinion, he should have died twice by now, but he lives."

Lena sighed and taking the doctor's arm, said:

"Come, it's quite dark."

* * *

Night had already spread over the mountains. The air was cold and raw. Sounds became muffled as if they had been rolled in something soft and fluffy. The moonlight, rather dull in the sky, shone like metal on the ground.

Everything stood transfixed in the stillness and brightness.

Komkov said in a low voice:

"Once I read a profound thought in Turgenev's *Faust*: 'Who knows how many seeds each one who lives on earth leaves behind him, destined to sprout only after his death?' You and I will die, Lenochka, but we will not leave a ledge like this, no sequoias like these, not even a wretched water pipe. I envy that nameless ancestor. . . ."

"We will not leave?" protested Lena resentfully. "We will leave people such as the world has never seen before. We will leave happiness."

After that they remained silent for a long time. The night was still and did not distract one's thoughts, and it seemed to them that at that hour those who were asleep were having long, pleasant dreams, and those who were awake were dreaming too, hard that it was possible to touch their thoughts like these silvery-black trees that, one after another, came forward to meet them out of the shadow of the mountainside.

Enchanted by the beauty of the mournful night, Lena mused over the length, the infinity of human life. This dead rock, for example,

it is somebody's life. This rivulet, sleeping while it runs, perhaps it too is the trail of a life cut with a stubborn pick. The bridge they had just crossed is also somebody's immortality. And this road, the pine trees and the fountain on the roadside, all are human lives, and if some magician could awaken the silence of the years, how they would all begin to talk, in what a mighty chorus would they sing! "I am bringing water across the barren mountains with my pick," the river would cry. "I am hacking a path through the impassable forest," the road would say. "I am planting the first pine tree on the slope of the windy hill, let there be woods and shade here for those that come after me," the woods would whisper. Man has lived on earth for thousands of years, and the earth has felt the power and strength of innumerable human hands. Who will say that the gorge from which this moist breeze is now blowing was cut only by mountain rivers without the aid of man? Who can tell how much amidst the slate and rock in the earth there is dust from the bones and moisture from the blood of generations that have passed away?

And Lena yearned, as if for happiness, to become a clump of earth, a corner of an

ancient rock, or a rivulet by the roadside in order to live after her body had decomposed.

When no one will remember that a Zhurina had ever lived, the spring that she will strike from the rock will still be flowing, the road that she will lay will not be overgrown with grass, and the trees planted on the rocky mountainside will not wither but grow and spread and attract birds and animals, and another woman on a night like this will, with love and envy, remember her nameless predecessor.

The thought that she would never be able to tell the one she loved all that filled her older and maturer heart this night made her sad. How she had suffered because she had not been able to help the man from whom she had received so much. She was now capable of doing much more; but at that time she had been poor in spirit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

In the middle of February, just as a motorship was putting off from a port on the Caucasian coast, a tall, handsome woman in a leather overcoat that bore traces of epaulets, walked up the gangway. She carried only a small suitcase as if she had decided to make the journey on the spur of the moment. A heavy gale had been blowing for the past two days, the voyage was expected to be a rough one and there were few passengers on the boat.

As soon as she had placed her things in her cabin the woman went on deck, but hardly able to keep on her feet owing to the force of the wind, she quickly returned. The air, filled with small, stinging stones, whirled, howled and groaned. It was intolerably hard to breathe the whirling air; you could not swallow it, it stuck in the throat in lumps and threatened to choke you.

In the cabin the woman took off her leather coat, remaining in a well-made dark-green costume with two rows of medal ribbons on her breast, and taking up a book, proceeded to the saloon. The passengers there chaffed her for the courage that had prompted her, a lone woman, to embark on a dangerous voyage like this. She answered in a tone of reserve that she was travelling on urgent business and, choosing a seat nearest to the radiator, became engrossed in her book.

She did not glance at the shore as the boat put out to sea, nor was she roused from her reverie even when the first heavy waves struck the ship's side, causing the ship to tremble and roll.

Passengers soon become acquainted with each other. An hour later many of them knew each other's names and patronymics, were talking about the storm, discussing cures for seasickness and the food served on the ship, inventing games and, listening to the radio, exchanging opinions on international affairs.

She, however, did not join in the general conversation. Her handsome but tired face bore an expression of vexation. She really feared that her solitude would be disturbed. Indeed, this soon happened. First, a smart and very

affable Major, and then a tall, ungainly timber expert from Sukhumi travelling with his daughter, sat down near her and drew her into conversation.

After a little time they learned that she was a surgeon, had received her discharge from the army, had rested at a sanatorium and was now going to visit a patient whom she had not seen for a long time.

"The weather is against you," laughed the Major, and the timber expert said commiseratingly:

"You might have waited until the storm blew over. You'd have had an excellent voyage had you gone by the next boat."

She humbly agreed that it would have been better had she waited. Several minutes later they were addressing her by her name and patronymic.

"You were in a hurry, too much in a hurry, Alexandra Ivanovna," the timber expert kept repeating, failing to realize how he was searing her soul with his chatter. "With me and Vetka"—that's how he called his daughter whose name was Elizaveta—"with me and Vetka it was different. We simply couldn't put off the journey," and then he hastened to tell her that he had received an offer of a splendid

job from an old friend of his, a man named Tsimbal, and he and his daughter were going to investigate.

"You know, it was a wonderful thing what Timiryazev said: 'Praised be he who raises two ears of corn where one had grown before,' I think that's it, I've forgotten. So I'm going there to plant oaks and cedars."

There was nothing about this timber expert to suggest that he was capable of creating anything new. If anything, his lanky, raw-boned, dried-up figure suggested the nomad, the wanderer from field to field; but that only meant that the call of the earth had reached even such as he, and that they too had risen up and were seeking where to sow the seeds of their still unquenched hopes and aspirations.

The Major was travelling to Lvov *via* Odessa. He had lost his family and had no attachments; nothing but the battlefield attracted him now. Being now in the reserves, he had chosen for his residence a place that was associated with his purest and most noble reminiscences—a little village in the foothills of the Carpathians where he was known as a liberator. There, he thought, he would be able to start anew his life which had been wrecked by the war.

Two women, mother and daughter-in-law, were going to the son and husband in the Ukraine, where he had remained to work after he had been wounded.

Two Baku workers with their families were going to Kaliningrad.

The lust for wandering which had swept the country had taken the trail of luck. People were seeking new havens and new occupations.

"And I too will seek a place in life where I will grow like the ear of corn the timber expert spoke about," Alexandra Ivanovna reflected mournfully. "But who knows.... Somebody has very well said that happiness is a by-product, it is obtained when striving to get something entirely different...."

In the evening, as soon as dusk had shut out the view of the sea and the waves beat more heavily than ever against the ship's sides, the passengers dispersed to their respective cabins; but Goreva, the timber expert and his daughter, and the two Caucasians remained in the saloon. The tedium of the rough night seemed to be more easily borne here.

Since the morning the Caucasians had been drinking wine, singing and embracing. They had begun to drink and sing immediately after breakfast and continued doing so until late in

the evening, indifferent to everything except their endless song, which they did not seem to be able to finish, either because it really had no end, or because they could not find it.

In the middle of the night the ship rolled a couple of times so heavily that several cabin doors flew open, children began to wail, the voices of seamen were heard on deck and the lights were put on again in the semi-dark bar.

Alexandra Ivanovna, however, sat unmoved.

"There's no danger, is there?" the timber expert enquired in a whisper.

She woke from her reveries as if she had been dozing.

"I think not. Come over here and sit with me, Vetochka," she said and wrapped a corner of her fluffy white shawl round the girl.

"Where will you stay?" the timber expert asked her.

"I don't know. I suppose I will find a hotel."

"Come with us. We'll put our things together and we'll take you along."

"No, no, thank you."

This strange journey, against which her reason and pride had protested so strongly, was

coming to an end. It is difficult to explain how it had come about. Looking at a timetable, she had seen the name of the town where Voropayev was living and had felt that she could resist no longer. Without finishing her stay at the sanatorium she booked a berth, but did not inform Voropayev that she was coming.

What was in store for her? It is terrible to feel that you are unwanted where only recently you had been indispensable; but it is still more terrible to pass by without trying your luck once again.

She had received no letters from Voropayev, nor did Golyshev, with whom she remained in correspondence, know anything about him.

All this made her feel very anxious.

"Suppose he is dead?... What if I find nothing but the plot of ground in which his body lies buried?..."

But happily, the idea that Voropayev could die could not fix itself in her mind and soon it vanished, leaving two hesitant tears on her cheeks.

And with these tears she fell asleep in her armchair.

At dawn the ship crept slowly into a little harbour, the water of which was the colour of

clay. In the distance, on the dripping pier, crowds of people and a line of motor trucks were visible; but the shore, screened by a curtain of rain, seemed deserted.

Goreva walked down the slippery gangway with the upturned steps after all the other passengers had gone.

A militiaman directed her to the District Committee headquarters.

The wind splashed the puddles on the miry road and the century-old trees rustled and wildly waved their branches; but after the rough sea, the bad weather on shore seemed almost pleasant.

Voropayev was not at the District Committee. The secretary said that he was unwell and was lying at home.

"Does he live far from here?"

The secretary pointed to a two-storey house across the street.

"Number four. The door is unlocked. They'll be bringing him the mail soon."

"Thanks."

On reaching the street she realized she was carrying her suitcase and not knowing what to do with it she halted, but, deciding not to go back, she stepped across to the house that had been pointed out to her and went to the upper

floor feeling that her knees were trembling —evidently the effects of the rough sea voyage, she surmised.

Right in front of her a door stood ajar. She entered.

From the dingy hall she could see part of a large room, a camp bed against the wall, and him, propped up on a pillow.

Voropayev's face had not changed in the least, except that it was much paler, wearier and more tense.

A childish voice singing softly came from behind the wall.

He raised his eyes from the papers he was reading, expecting somebody to enter his room.

"Yuri?" he enquired, and then had a fit of coughing. "Is that you?"

"No it is I," she said softly and halted at the door, looking at but not seeing him, only hearing and feeling as if in a dream:

"You?... Shura, my..." he enquired scarcely above a whisper.

"Yes, I."

She crossed the room and without removing her coat sat on the edge of his bed.

"Shura!... My God! How... what fate brought you here?"

"My fate, Alyosha," and she smiled, not

knowing what else to say. "Well, and how are you here . . . in your Paradise?"

He did not answer her. His eyes spoke for him. He gazed at her as if he were peering into himself and she trembled with anxiety at what he would find there. And suddenly his eyes slowly, timidly lit up with such unfeigned joy that she realized that everything would be all right.

Then she leaned towards him and kissed his pale lips, which seemed to have become like those of a child, and she felt the strong and nervous hand of her senior rest gently on her head.

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